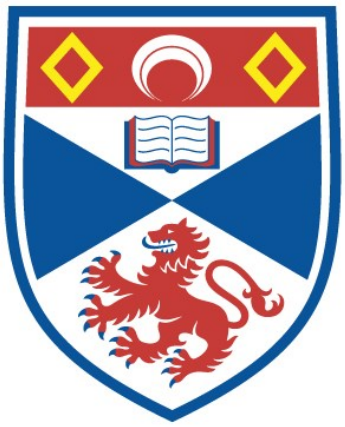
ASPECTS OF MODERN SCOTTISH LITERATURE AND ECOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Louisa Gairn

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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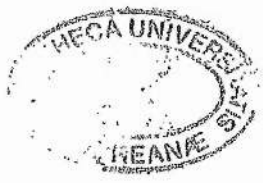

Abstract

'Aspects of Modern Scottish Literature and Ecological Thought' argues that the science and philosophy of 'ecology' has had a profound impact on Scottish literature since the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, and relates the work of successive generations of Scottish writers to concurrent developments in ecological thought and the environmental sciences.

Chapter One suggests that, while Romantic ways of thinking about the natural world remained influential in nineteenth-century culture, new environmental theories provided fresh ways of perceiving the world, evident from the writings of Scottish mountaineers. Chapter Two explores the confrontation of modernity and wilderness in the fiction and travel writings of Robert Louis Stevenson, and some contemporaries such as John Muir. Chapter Three suggests that ecologically-sensitive local and global concerns, rather than 'national' ones *per se*, are central to the work of Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and others, while Chapter Four demonstrates that post-war 'rural' writers including Nan Shepherd, Neil Gunn, Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown, often viewed as peripheral, are actually central and of international relevance, and challenges the assumption that there is a fundamental divide between Scottish rural and urban writing. Finally, Chapter Five argues that contemporary writers John Burnside, Kathleen Jamie and Alan Warner are not only reviewing human relationships with nature, but also the role writing has to play in exploring and strengthening that relationship, helping to determine the ecological 'value' of poetry and fiction.

By looking at Scottish literature through the lens of ecological thought, and engaging with international discourses of 'Ecocriticism', this thesis provides a fresh perspective in contrast to the dominant critical views of modern Scottish literature, and demonstrates that Scottish writing constitutes a heritage of ecological thought which, in this age of environmental awareness, should be recognised as not only relevant, but vital.

DECLARATIONS

(i) I, Louisa Gairn, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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(ii) I was admitted as a research student in September 2001 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in September 2002; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2001 and 2004.

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(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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For my parents,

James and Margaret Gairn

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I have been lucky enough to receive a great deal of help and support in preparing this thesis, from family, friends and colleagues alike, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their generosity and kindness.

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Louisa Gairn
St Andrews
December 2004

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Introduction:
Re-mapping Modern Scottish Literature

> Knowing the *how*, and celebrating the *that*, it seems to me, is the basis of meaningful dwelling: what interests me about ecology and poetry is that, together, they make up a science of belonging, a discipline by which we may both describe and celebrate the 'everything that is the case' of the world, and so become worthy participants in a natural history. [1]
>
> Biodiversity, whether vegetal, animal, human, geophysical, or astrophysical, is surely the key. [2]

This thesis suggests that ecological thought, which asks questions about being in the world, about 'dwelling' and 'belonging', and most fundamentally, about the relationships between humans and the natural environment, has been a valuable and significant concept in the work of Scottish writers since the mid-nineteenth century. When the Grampian novelist Nan Shepherd wrote that 'Knowledge does not dispel mystery...the more one learns of this intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissues of plant and insect... the more the mystery deepens', she picked up on an important idea which has more recently been recognised by the Scottish poet, John Burnside, whose latest work

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[1] John Burnside. 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology'. Forthcoming essay, quoted with permission from the author. n.pag.
[2] Edwin Morgan. 'Roof of Fireflies' (1999). *Strong Words: modern poets on modern poetry*. Ed. W.N. Herbert & Matthew Hollis. Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2000. 190-194, p.192.

speaks of his attempts to fuse ecology and poetry to produce a 'science of belonging'.[3] This thesis contends that writing about the natural world is a vital component of a diverse Scottish literature; that Scotland's literary culture over the past one hundred and fifty years has, at every stage, both reflected and interrogated the ecological concepts that were being – and continue to be – developed by the environmental sciences. In doing so, the present thesis seeks to re-map modern Scottish literature according to a thematic perspective which has been both marginalised and downgraded in much recent criticism. Since both global and localised environmental issues are at the forefront of the public imagination, it is time for a reconsideration of Scottish literature in the light of ecological thought.

Looking at modern Scottish writing within an ecological framework challenges the common belief that there is a fundamental division between urban and rural writing in modern Scotland – an assumption which has been integral to the work of many literary critics over the past twenty years. The supposed rift between rural and urban in Western society in general and Scotland in particular has led to a distorted outlook on Scottish literature: either writers are indulging in Romantic 'escapism'

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[3] Nan Shepherd. 'The Living Mountain'. *The Grampian Quartet*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996. p.45

or they are exposing brutal 'realities'. The truth is that the situation is not so black and white – or so green and red. The real problem here is the writer's approach rather than his or her subject matter. The poet Kathleen Jamie recently said 'I take my solace in the natural world...my local landscape, the energy of the land', although she admits 'Being in the thick of it rather prevents one from wandering lonely as a cloud'.[4] Writing about the natural world, or about rural experience, need not be some sort of Romantic avoidance tactic, but can bring both writer and reader back to 'being-in-the-world', understanding what it means to be 'in the thick of it'.

Since the potential range of its subject is vast, this thesis is not intended to be an exhaustive survey; the writers studied have been selected for both their literary quality and for the interesting and often unexpected ways in which ecological thought is represented in their work. This has meant that certain authors have received less attention than might be expected. Kenneth White's Zen-influenced 'geopoetics' or Norman MacCaig's animal poems might seem obvious candidates for an ecologically-minded outlook on Scottish literature, while figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid or Edwin Morgan, who have received more attention in the present study,

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[4] Kathleen Jamie, in *Don't Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their own words*. Ed. Clare Brown and Don Paterson. London: Picador, 2003. p.125; 127

may seem surprising choices in this context. However, it is the objective of this thesis to challenge received notions about Scottish literature and the natural world, and in doing so, offer some provocative re-readings of writers across the spectrum of Scottish literary culture. So, while acknowledging the significance of writers like White, MacCaig, Gavin Maxwell and others, the thesis avoids taking the most obvious route. This methodology demonstrates how 'canonical' writers like Robert Louis Stevenson can continue to be read in new ways, and how urban writers such as Morgan, or even Archie Hind, have a relevance to rural and environmental issues which is rarely acknowledged. Equally, this ecological viewpoint brings more marginalised rural writers like Nan Shepherd, Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown back to the centre of Scottish literary culture.

I have quite deliberately begun my study of Scottish literature and ecological thought in the mid-nineteenth century, past the height of the Romantic period, and at a time when the environmental sciences were being formed into distinctive and provocative new discourses about the relationship between humans and the natural world. Whilst ecological values and concepts have a history which pre-dates the official formulation of 'ecology' as a science, it makes sense to begin with the

1862 definition of 'oekology' as explained by the originator of the term, the German scientist Ernst Haeckel:

> By ecology we mean the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment; including above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact – in a word, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.[5]

Literally meaning 'house study', ecology started off as a biological science, a new way of looking at 'natural history' which took its cue from Darwinian evolutionary theory and, as the scientific historian Peter Bowler observes, initially it had 'no clear-cut links to the environmental movement'.[6] As the eco-critic, Neil Evernden, points out, ecology 'begins as a normal, reductionist science', but 'to its own surprise it winds up denying the subject-object relationship upon which science rests'.[7] For Evernden, as for other ecologically-minded critics, the subversive aspect of ecology is precisely its premise of 'inter-relatedness'.[8] The concept of

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[5] Ernst Haeckel, quoted by Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. p.36

[6] Peter J. Bowler. *The Norton History of the Environmental Sciences*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992. p. 377

[7] Neil Evernden. 'Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy'. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty & Harold Fromm. Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 92-104. p.93

[8] The idea of ecology as a 'subversive' science was also suggested by the American Beat poet and environmental activist Gary Snyder in *The Subversive Science: Essays towards an Ecology of Man*. Ed. Shepard & McKinley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

interrelations between organisms and their environment, and indeed the breakdown of the categories of 'self' and 'other' which have followed in the light of that central idea, is what makes ecological thought so attractive to many modern thinkers and writers. The resolution of dualistic categories allows a way of escape from the old Cartesian dualisms which have defined Western thought for so long: self/other, culture/nature, mind/body. Descartes, and the tradition of scientific authority which followed in his wake, is often blamed by ecocritics as the source of Western civilisation's perceived alienation from nature. Robert Pogue Harrison and Jonathan Bate have both identified Descartes' will towards 'mastery and possession of nature', suggesting that the 'Cartesian distinction between the *res cogitans*, or thinking self, and the *res extensa*, or embodied substance, sets up the terms for the objectivity of science and the abstraction from historicity, location, nature, and culture'.[9] However, the rigid categories suggested by Cartesian philosophy are difficult to maintain in the face of new evidence that, for example, human perception occurs at the point of interface with the environment, rather than by the internal processing of external stimuli, or that the human body itself is permeable, part of its environment rather

[9] Robert Pogue Harrison, from *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization*, quoted by Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth*, London: Picador, 2000. p.87.

than a discrete entity.[10] The ecological anthropologist Tim Ingold has recently suggested a new 'conception of the human being not as a composite entity made up of separable but complementary parts, such as body, mind and culture, but rather as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships'.[11] Ecological discourses thus not only highlight important environmental concerns; they allow for the growth of a new sense of self, one which radically differs from what has gone before. One might begin to think of this newly configured relationship between humans and the environment as one of osmosis rather than consumption; with this new knowledge, the attentive, semi-permeable, natural self might find it difficult to think of its environment as a functional resource, ready to be exploited.

Over the past decades, ecological thought has radically changed our way of thinking about our local environments and the earth as a whole. 'Nature' is no longer viewed as a stable system of useful commodities or as an immutable backdrop to human life, but as a fragile system which human actions can and do modify, pollute or even destroy. The American naturalist Rachel Carson helped to popularise the environmental cause with the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962, a book about the devastating

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[10] See Tim Ingold's 'General Introduction' to *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. pp.1-7.
[11] *Ibid.* pp.4-5

environmental effects of agricultural pesticides in the USA, whilst James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' did much to bring ecological concepts to a wider audience, with his book, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1974). Lovelock's hypothesis was that earth is 'a superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks' – a holistic idea which, as Lovelock acknowledges, was perhaps first voiced by the Scottish 'father of geology', James Hutton, in 1785.[12] Other popular works which feature ecological thought include Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), which has since proved influential in anthropological and sociological theory. In many ways, ecological literary criticism emerged out of the 1960s and 70s 'counter-cultural' climate, which also contributed to the development of feminist, Marxist and post-colonial critical discourses. The activities of the Beat poets and environmental activists, particularly of North America, were crucial, bringing ecological ideas and issues into the public consciousness, but also helping to force through legislation which ensured some protection for the natural world. It is interesting to note, however, that in an age of increasing environmental awareness, attitudes to nature within cultural studies have tended more towards the abstract side of post-structuralism, viewing nature as a 'societal category' or a 'linguistic construct' rather

[12] Hutton said 'I consider the earth to be a superorganism, and its proper study is by physiology'. Quoted in James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. p. xvii

than a discrete entity.[13] Jean Baudrillard is perhaps representative of this sort of view; in his travels across the American desert he saw, instead of natural geological features, a landscape of 'signs'; Monument Valley as 'blocks of language...destined to become, like all that is cultivated - like all culture - natural parks'.[14]

The foremost British 'ecocritic', Jonathan Bate, started 'doing ecological literary criticism' when he 'grew impatient with a tendency among the most advanced readers of William Wordsworth to claim that there is "no such thing as nature"'.[15] An 'ecological criticism', Karl Kroeber suggests, escapes 'from the esoteric abstractness that afflicts current theorising about literature' and 'seizes opportunities offered by recent biological research to make humanistic studies more socially responsible'.[16] Arguing for a more holistic approach to literary studies, Kroeber goes on to argue that 'ecological criticism resists current academic overemphasis on the rationalistic at the expense of sensory, emotional, and imaginative aspects of art'.[17] A variety of definitions of these new perspectives have

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[13] Georg Lukacs. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics.* (1923) 1971. p.234
[14] Jean Baudrillard. *America.* Trans. Chris Turner. London & New York: Verso, 1986. p.4
[15] Jonathan Bate. 'Out of the twilight', *New Statesman.* July 16 2001, v.130 i.4546, p.25
[16] Karl Kroeber. *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. p. 1
[17] Kroeber, p.2

emerged, but Cheryl Glotfelty's summary in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) is perhaps the most straightforward:

> all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.[18]

Glotfelty goes on to argue that, while in most postmodern theory, 'the world' denotes the anthropocentric sphere of language and culture, ecological criticism 'expands "the world" to include the entire ecosphere'.[19]

The first critical studies to explicitly relate works of literature to ecological modes of thought appeared in the 1970s, with a small number of American literary critics developing perspectives which reflected the growing cultural awareness of environmental matters in the United States. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) was the first lengthy work of ecocriticism, while a small number of articles emerged later in the 70s, including William Rueckert's essay,

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[18] Cheryl Glotfelty's 'Introduction' to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Cheryl Glotfelty & Harold Fromm (Eds.) Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996. p.xix

[19] *Ibid.* p.xix

'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' of 1978.[20] As Glotfelty notes, these early 'ecocritics' were largely unaware of one another, and it was not until the 1980s that environmental perspectives on literature began to be more widely theorised.[21] Some significant book-length 'ecocritical' studies to emerge from this movement include Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991),[22] Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994),[23] and Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000). A number of anthologies of ecological criticism have appeared in the wake of Glotfelty and Fromm's groundbreaking *Ecocriticism Reader*, including Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells' *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998),[24] Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader: from Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000),[25] Steven Rosendale's *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory and the Environment*

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[20] Joseph W. Meeker. *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. New York: Scribner's 1972. Rueckert's article was first published in *Iowa Review* 9.1 (Winter 1978), 71-86; repr. *The Ecocriticism Reader*, pp.105-123.
[21] See Glotfelty's 'Introduction' to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, p.xvii
[22] Jonathan Bate. *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1991.
[23] Karl Kroeber. *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
[24] Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (Eds.) *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. London: Zed, 1998.
[25] Laurence Coupe (Ed.) *The Green Studies Reader: from Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.

(2002)[26] and John Parham's *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (2002), which is the most recent British collection.[27]

While Romanticism and American literature have proved particularly fruitful areas of research for ecocritics thus far, the importance of ecological thought in Scottish writing has been very much neglected. Given the remarkable importance of the Scottish landscape for the Romantic imagination, this neglect is especially striking. Jonathan Bate's landmark study of ecological traditions in English literature, *The Song of the Earth*, effectively ignores Scottish writers, focusing instead on figures belonging to the English 'canon' as well as some international twentieth-century poets; the only Scottish writer to receive significant consideration in Bate's study was George Gordon Byron.[28] With *The Song of the Earth*'s focus on Romanticism, taking in Rousseau, Wordsworth, Coleridge and others, one might have expected Walter Scott, or James Macpherson's 'Ossian' to receive at least some passing mention. And, while future editions of his work may well include references to the contemporary Scottish poet, John Burnside, whose work has a definitively ecological

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[26] Steven Rosendale (Ed.) *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory and the Environment.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002.
[27] John Parham (Ed.) *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature.* Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2002. The essays are the outcome of two conferences held in the late 1990s: 1997 Literature and Natural Environment Conference (University of Wales, Swansea) and the 1998 Culture and Environmentalism Conference (Bath Spa University College.
[28] See Bate's chapter on 'Major Weather' in *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 94-118.

cast, as it stands, *The Song of the Earth*, like most other major works of ecocriticism, locates Scottish writing only on the margins of its consciousness.[29]

Some inroads are beginning to be made into the topic of Scottish literature and ecology. Christopher MacLachlan's essay on 'Nature in Scottish Literature' in *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* edited by the American ecocritic, Patrick D. Murphy, is perhaps the most significant piece to emerge thus far.[30] Ranging over Scottish writing from the Romantic period until the mid-twentieth century, MacLachlan highlights some crucial issues about the traditional representations of Scottish environments, such as the Highlands being identified as a 'Romantic' landscape, or as an arena for adventure, in Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, and John Buchan; the 'Kailyard' representations of Scotland in the mid-late nineteenth century rural novel; and the links between the landscape and Scotland's 'mythic past' in the twentieth-century novels of Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Neil Gunn. More recently, Chris Powici has been exploring the ecological and literary significance of

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[29] Bate did not know of John Burnside's interest in ecology when *The Song of the Earth* was written, but has since expressed admiration for Burnside's poetry and wrote the preface to *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring'*. Ed. John Burnside & Maurice Riordan. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004.

[30] Christopher MacLachlan. 'Nature in Scottish Literature'. *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*. Ed. Patrick D. Murphy. Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998. 184-190

the Scots-born founder of the US National Parks movement, John Muir, who wrote a number of 'wilderness discovery' books charting his travels across wild territory.[31]

Despite the lack, until very recently, of an overtly 'ecological' viewpoint on modern Scottish literature, environmental questions have been percolating into the world of Scottish cultural studies for some years. In accordance with critical responses provoked by the 1970s and 80s turn to place or 'territory', represented, for example, by Seamus Heaney's poetry and his influential essay, 'The Sense of Place', there has been a growing critical awareness of the importance of location and environment in shaping Scottish writing.[32] Concurrent with this, there has been an acknowledgement of the significance of rural or 'provincial' locations in the personal and artistic development of key Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid.[33] Similarly, considerations of Scottish novelistic 'regionalism', despite the parochialising connotations that term sometimes evokes, have been a significant proportion of the output of

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[31] Chris Powici, forthcoming article on 'What is Wilderness? John Muir and the Question of the Wild' for the *Scottish Studies Review*.

[32] Seamus Heaney. 'The Sense of Place'. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978*. London: Faber, 1980. Critical studies which consider the relationship between writers and localities include Robert Crawford's *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993, and Norman Page & Peter Preston (Eds.) *The Literature of Place*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.

[33] See Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Scottish literary criticism over the past decades.[34] The late twentieth-century critical 'rediscovery' of certain rural novels, such as George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*, combined with reassessments of the nineteenth-century 'Kailyard' school by Ian Campbell and others, has helped to foster an awareness of questions about the adequacy of certain representations of Scotland's rural environments.[35] More recently, hitherto neglected 'regional' writers like Nan Shepherd have received significant critical attention by scholars such as Cairns Craig and Roderick Watson, and even feature in the work of cultural geographers.[36] The activities of the Scottish publishing industry perhaps reveal more about the significance of such books than the writings of literary critics, however. These too point to a revival of early twentieth-century 'rural' or 'regional' novelists, with the recent re-issues of the more obscure novels of Nan Shepherd, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and others, and the continuing popularity of writers such as Hugh

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[34] For example, Douglas Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1983.

[35] See, for example, Ian Campbell, *Kailyard*. Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1981.

[36] See Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; Nan Shepherd, *The Grampian Quartet*, Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996; Roderick Watson, ' "To Know Being": Substance and Spirit in the Work of Nan Shepherd', *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Ed. Douglas Gifford & Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997; Gillian Carter. ' "Domestic geography" and the politics of Scottish landscape in Nan Shepherd's "The Living Mountain".' *Gender Place Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, v.8, no.1, Mar. 2001, 25-36.

MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown.[37] Altogether, this constitutes persuasive evidence that supposedly 'peripheral' Scottish writers and texts are receiving more attention and gaining the readership they deserve.

It is true to say that the discourses of ecocriticism, together with considerations of 'place' and philosophical considerations of ecology and the natural world, can be seen as part of an emerging field of 'Green cultural studies', which 'links green concerns with the many-headed politico-ethical family of cultural studies'.[38] Historians of Scotland's environment, such as T.C. Smout and Robert A. Lambert, have helped to add ecology to a field which has until recently been dominated by questions of nationalist politics, cultural identity and social change. Lambert's *Species history in Scotland: introductions and extinctions since the Ice Age* (1998) and *Contested mountains: nature, development and environment in the Cairngorms region of Scotland, 1880-1980* (2001), together with Smout's works, which include *The History of Soils and Field Systems* (1994), *Scottish Woodland History* (1997), *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern Ireland since 1600* (2000) and *Nature, Landscape and*

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[37] For example, Polygon recently re-issued the entire series of Lewis Grassic Gibbon/James Leslie Mitchell's novels, including the previously out-of-print *Spartacus* and *The Lost Trumpet.*

[38] Jhan Hochman. 'Green Cultural Studies'. *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook.* p.422

People since the Second World War (2001) are striking examples of this new area of research in Scottish history. [39] Such publications are evidence, if more were needed, that a variety of disciplines are beginning to recognise the importance of ecological thought, and that, as John Burnside says, we are all 'participants in a natural history'.[40] They also demonstrate how far traditional divisions between the 'arts and humanities' and scientific subjects are being bridged by new interdisciplinary, ecologically-aware perspectives.

Perhaps most significant, however, is the growing public awareness of environmental issues, in Scotland and elsewhere. Whilst at the height of the industrial era, societal attitudes to the environment were of relatively little concern to legislators, in post-industrial Scotland, coverage of ecological matters in the Scottish press has brought questions of land use and ownership, 'sustainability', wildlife protection and conservation to the fore, with the public recognition that Scotland's natural environment

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[39] Robert A. Lambert. *Species history in Scotland : introductions and extinctions since the Ice Age*. Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1998; Robert A. Lambert. *Contested mountains : nature, development and environment in the Cairngorms region of Scotland, 1880-1980*. Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001; S. Foster & T.C. Smout. *The history of soils and field systems*. Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press, 1994; T.C. Smout (Ed.). *Scottish woodland history*. Edinburgh : Scottish Cultural Press, 1997; T.C. Smout *Nature contested : environmental history in Scotland and Northern Ireland since 1600*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000; T.C. Smout *Nature, landscape and people since the Second World War*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press in association with the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Centre for Environmental History and Policy at the Universities of St Andrews and Stirling, 2001.

[40] John Burnside. 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology'. n.pag.

is both valuable and fragile, and can no longer be viewed as an inexhaustible resource for human industry. The current debates over renewable sources of energy, such as wind farming or wave power, demonstrate just how mainstream ecological questions have become in Scotland, and how global issues such as climate change are related in the public consciousness to specific, local concerns over land use and environmental impact. Equally significant is the recent groundbreaking legislation which led to the creation of two Scottish national parks, at Loch Lomond and in the Cairngorms, after more than one hundred years of campaigning begun by the mountaineering Liberal MP, James Bryce – and more than one hundred years of attentive, vibrant Scottish writing about the natural world.

While aware of such broad theoretical and political questions, the following thesis is generally historically structured, and divides into five principal sections. Chapter 1, 'Feelings for Nature in Victorian Scotland', argues that, while Romantic ways of thinking about the natural world remained important touchstones for mid-late nineteenth-century culture, new ways of exploring relationships between self and environment were being formulated, which are reflected in Scottish literature of the period. Developments in science, such as Darwin's pivotal *On the Origin of Species* and the formulation of the term 'ecology' to denote 'all the various

relations of animals and plants to one another and to the outer world' in the 1860s, marked a conceptual division between philosophies of nature-human relationships in the Romantic period and those espoused later in the century. Some of the implications of this shift are demonstrated by the mountaineering intellectual John Veitch's *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry* (1887) and *The History and Poetry of the Scottish Border* (1878), in which the author observes that this feeling 'evolves' over time with successive stages of cultural development.[41] His viewpoint is a mixture of Wordsworthian Romanticism, Victorian ideas about 'mastery' and 'leisure', with a significant strain of Darwinian evolutionary philosophy, stressing that aesthetic nature appreciation and the physical skills needed to negotiate the Scottish landscape are inheritable, and moulded by the environment itself in a process of adaptation. This strand of Scottish thinking ties in with early discourses of 'environmentalism', which focus on the primary influence of the environment on the self, and by extension, on regional and national groups. Concurrent with this, the definition of 'feeling' is broadened by new scientific and philosophical theories of self-world interaction. For example, the Scottish psychologist Alexander Bain suggests in treatises such as *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855) that 'feeling' denotes not only emotional response but bodily

[41] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*. Vol I. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1887. p.5

sensation and practical intelligence, and that physical movement is a fundamental way of perceiving environments.[42]

All of this points to a newly physical, bodily ideology of nature appreciation, which is paralleled by the proliferation of adventure fiction and travel writing from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Such discourses are co-emergent with the rise of mountaineering, a way of engaging with natural landscapes which becomes institutionalised by the formation of a variety of clubs from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Victorian mountaineering produced a vast literature which can be located alongside narratives of exploration such as David Livingstone's *Journals*. While some Scottish mountaineers engaged in an elitist discourse of 'mastery' and 'conquest', and were complicit in the control over the Highland environment by wealthy landowners at the cost of its native inhabitants, mountaineering itself remains an essentially ambivalent occupation. Other members of the mountaineering fraternity engaged in more subversive environmental politics, with mountaineering intellectuals like John Stuart Blackie aligning themselves with both the 'Rights of Way' movement and the Highland 'Land Rights' dispute. Such debates over land use are symptomatic of both the changing philosophy

[42] See Alexander Bain. *The Senses and the Intellect*. London: John W. Parker & Son, 1855. p.67

of how 'self' relates to 'world' in the nineteenth century, and the desire to conserve 'wild' or 'natural' areas for reasons which are not only Romantic but allied to ideals of social justice and personal freedom – reasons which would become crucial to the designation of wilderness areas as 'national parks' in North America.

Highlighting Gaelic culture's methods of relating to the environment in contrast to the activities of the landed upper-classes, Blackie draws attention to an emerging counter-cultural discourse of 'rambling', 'straivaiging' or 'wandering at will'. Such activities, this thesis suggests, engage with both Scottish radical intellectualism and American wilderness ideals of liberty, as well as the principles of freedom and observation held by the metropolitan *flâneur*. The rambling botanists of the mid-nineteenth century share similar traits to the *flâneur* who, as Walter Benjamin suggests, likes to go 'botanising' on the streets of the metropolis.[43] The development of such terminologies which describe new categories of human movement and observation is foundational to nineteenth-century environmentalism. Such changing attitudes amount to a devaluation of more passive forms of Romantic spectatorship found in previous works of Scottish literature such as Walter Scott's novel,

[43] See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Verso Editions, 1983.

Waverley. Linking the activity of 'stravaiging' with adventure fiction and ideals of athletic masculinity, I suggest that David Balfour, the protagonist in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, is 'fit' in a way in which Scott's Romantic spectator, Edward Waverley, is not. Freedom of movement across natural landscapes and the 'fitness' this requires (I use the term aware of both its athletic and evolutionary connotations) are also important in the construction of masculine identities, and part of an increasing focus on the body. Bodily health is linked with societal morality, and represented as 'harmonious' with nature. This sort of rhetoric engages with the kind of elitism found in some mountaineering circles, but it also links to more sinister theories of 'social Darwinism', Victorian paranoia about health and racial 'degeneration', and later fascist ideologies of 'blood and soil'. Examples of such ideologies of health and harmony abound in Livingstone's writings, and in the articles and books produced by the Scottish mountaineers. Stevenson, too, engages with the idea of athletic or physical interactions with the natural world as a 'cure' for a weak or sick body, but his sensibilities lie with a more democratic view of nature-human relationships; American wilderness ideals of health, camaraderie and environment.

Stevenson's globe-trotting, together with his reading of and correspondence with international writers, forms the basis for Chapter 2, 'Rural Flâneurs'. In nineteenth-century travel, ideologies of 'modernity' and 'wilderness' confront one another. This chapter relates Stevenson's early travel writings to the emergent literature of travel in nineteenth-century culture, arguing that what makes Stevenson special is his attentiveness to subject matter which often manifests itself as boyish wonder, as well as his ironic stance towards traditional 'Romanticism'. Taking up the important issue of 'exile' which has been highlighted in much Stevenson criticism, Chapter 2 contrasts Stevenson's lifestyle of constant change and travel with the supposedly 'ecological' values of rootedness and local knowledge, arguing for the validity of travel as a way of ecological 'being in the world'. Stevenson's international mobility is a way of life at odds with the ideals of 'local knowledge' promoted by the likes of Thomas Hardy or Henry David Thoreau. In fact, Stevenson's adaptation of American ideals of 'living deliberately' can be read as a form of ecological 'dwelling' and a search for the ideal of 'authenticity' which Existentialist philosophers would develop in the twentieth century.[44] Stevenson finds Thoreau's individualism and aloofness distasteful, preferring the vigorous and inclusive Walt Whitman whose

[44] 'Living deliberately' is Henry David Thoreau's phrase, from *Walden, or Life in the Woods, and 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience'*. New York & London: The New American Library, 1960. p.66

sprawling vision of America, Stevenson argues, offers an alternative way of 'living deliberately'.

Despite the apparent ecological drawbacks of travel, what emerges in Stevenson's work is a version of 'ecopoetics' in which travel itself is a conceptual 'dwelling-place', with the attentive, cheerful traveller as the best sort of ecological observer. Thoreau's contemplation of the organic nature of human house-building can be compared to Stevenson's consideration of way-finding as a 'natural expression' of human dwelling, suggesting that Stevenson applies a 'dwelling perspective' to pedestrian travel – a crucial idea which he perhaps picked up from his reading of Baudelaire, for whom the street was the only place the *flâneur* could feel at home. In fact, the *flâneur*, the figure identified by Baudelaire and Benjamin as a 'hero of modernity', is significant in the development of ecological perspectives in the late nineteenth century.[45] Remembering Benjamin's often forgotten contention that the *flâneur* originates in the wilderness rather than the city, it is possible to see how Stevenson and some contemporaries appropriate characteristics of the city-strolling observer in their experience of rural and wilderness environments, particularly in North America. The use of *vers libre* by Whitman and

[45] Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Verso Editions, 1983.

Stevenson reflects this crucial sympathy. The *flâneur*'s voyeuristic aloofness, valued by Baudelaire, is transformed by Stevenson into a sense of interconnection, a community of the road which presupposes certain aspects of modern ecological values – and feeds into later Beat ideas about being 'on the road'.[46] The ideals of liberty and wilderness which John Muir writes about in his autobiographical and travel books are central to the creation of the American National Park system. Muir and Stevenson share an emphasis on boyishness, adventure and 'fun' which is a frequent characteristic of writing about the natural world, encouraging bodily empathy and interconnectivity – later reflected in Neil Gunn's *Highland River*. Such ideas have a Scottish heritage in the work of Robert Burns, who is admired by both John Muir and Walt Whitman. Ultimately, travel and travel writing contribute significantly to the development of both environmental politics and ecological modes of observation in the late nineteenth century. Travel becomes, for Stevenson, a form of secular spirituality, with colonists and globe-trotters described as 'pilgrims' rather than exploiters.[47]

Chapter 3, 'Local and Global Outlooks', follows from this discussion of the new consciousness of global environments suggested by international

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[46] For example, Jack Kerouac. *On the Road*. London: Deutsch, 1958.
[47] See Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Will o' the Mill'. *Tales of Adventure*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1997. p.14

travel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to argue that a new conception of local and global in the environmental sciences leads to the development of new outlooks in Scottish literature in pre-WWII Scotland. I start with the point made by Patrick Geddes, the Scottish sociologist, geographer and town-planner, that twentieth-century consciousness is dominated by 'two poles of thought, cosmic and regional'.[48] Redefining the role of the geographer, Geddes was keen to emphasise the synthetic properties of the subject – that is, 'Geography' as the meeting point between various scientific disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, economics, physical geography, botany and zoology. That both MacDiarmid and Gibbon were interested in Geography is evident from MacDiarmid's participation in giving lectures on 'Political and Commercial Geography' and 'Town Planning' in 1918 as part of the Army Education Scheme, and Gibbon's biographies of geographical explorers including *Nine Against the Unknown* (1934), as well as novels such as *Three Go Back* (1932). Geddes was involved in the development of both 'universal geography' which focused on the totality of the terrestrial globe, and 'regionalism', which invoked ecological models of environmental interconnectivity. These perspectives fostered new ways of visualising global and local environments: Elisee Reclus's

[48] Patrick Geddes, 'Nature Study and Geographical Education'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Vol. XIX (1903), 525-536. p.526

gigantic model of the 'terrestrial globe' and Geddes's 'Outlook Tower'. The two viewpoints are fused in Geddes's 'Draft Plan for a National Institute of Geography', which would have been a building devoted to study of both global and regional geographies.[49] The radically new outlooks suggested by the environmental sciences in the early twentieth century are very much in keeping with the emergence of modernist experimentation, which itself demanded new modes of visualisation and representation. The confrontation of these new ideas can be traced in the work of 1930s Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Such dualities also reflect the tension between national identities and international discourses during this period. As has been suggested in a number of recent cultural studies, what might be called 'global' modernism is often rooted in 'provincial' identities.

MacDiarmid's early Scots lyrics in his collections *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926) abound with images of the globe seen from outer space, whilst in the 1930s he calls for a 'synoptic view' of Scotland, the need for humans to see the landscape 'better than an ordnance survey sees'.[50] This is similar to Auden's recommendation for poets to adopt the aloof posture of the 'hawk' or 'helmeted airman' - a viewpoint which can

[49] Patrick Geddes. 'Draft Plan for a National Institute of Geography'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Vol. XIX (1903), 142-144.
[50] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Scotland'. *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*. London: Jarrolds, 1934. p.14

be related to the rise of the Griersonian documentary film, with which both MacDiarmid and Auden were involved.[51] However, in contrast to Auden's sometimes alienating perspective, MacDiarmid's image of the 'eagle' in 'Direadh', invokes the Gaelic 'act of surmounting', which suggests a more holistic, involved outlook which seeks to reintegrate self and world.[52] Ultimately, MacDiarmid's early lyrics, particularly those written in Scots, reveal networks of thought, feeling and natural phenomena, conveying a sense of synthesis which is ecological at its root. These Scots lyrics parallel specific Scottish localities with the cosmic environment producing a paradoxical alienating and enfolding experience. The Scots words allow for complexity, contradiction and ambiguity, enclosed within the formal harmony of the lyric itself. Equally, Gibbon's lyrical narrative technique in *A Scots Quair* can be read as a form of 'ecological dialogics', with the interwoven, conflicting and contrasting voices of Scottish communities in some ways representative of the land on which they depend. The emergence of important regional novelists like Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Nan Shepherd, and Neil Gunn is related to the practice of ecological regional surveys like that of Frank Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology* (1955), as well as texts like Gibbon and MacDiarmid's collaborative miscellany,

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[51] W.H. Auden, 'Consider this and in our time', *Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber, 1991.

[52] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Direadh'. *Complete Poems, 1920-1976*. 2 vols. Vol. II. Ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken. London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1978. 1167-1171.

Scottish Scene (1934). MacDiarmid provocatively (and erroneously) suggests throughout *Scottish Scene* that there are no adequate surveys of Scotland or its regions by Scottish writers, either literary, scientific or sociological. However, *Scottish Scene* is itself a sort of 'survey' of Scotland in its historical, socio-political and environmental contexts.

Despite what MacDiarmid suggests, a number of environmental surveys of Scotland appeared in the 1930s, along with guidebooks and travel writings. An important contemporary 'survey' of Scotland is Edwin Muir's *Scottish Journey* (1935). In Muir's writing, processes of globalisation are acknowledged within the Scottish scene, with modern mass culture overwhelming the subtle, intuitive interrelationship between individual and place. His awareness of the 'disintegration' of the links between character and local environment is the same as the 'vast and terrifying disintegration' of the 'England of the organic community' F.R. Leavis and Denis Thompson wrote of in *Culture and Environment* (1933).[53] The stance was a seductive one, and is something which Gibbon himself finds attractive at times, but it is ultimately something which needs to be resisted, not only for its susceptibility to the propaganda of right-wing ideologies, but also in order to avoid the invention of a sort of eco-

[53] F.R. Leavis & Denys Thompson. *Culture and Environment: the Training of Critical Awareness*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1964.

kailyard. Writers like MacDiarmid and Gibbon were writing about rural experience which did not rely, and indeed was explicitly trying to get away from, sentiment and tradition. Gibbon's view emphasises his conviction of the innate 'peasant' connection with the soil, writing with pride of his background on the land and his sense that it is 'intimately mine', but he emphatically does not see 'back to nature' as either desirable or possible.[54] However, he does engage in some science-fiction utopianism which explores the possibilities of getting 'back to nature' whilst rejecting fascist ideologies of technology and racial mastery - most explicitly in *Gay Hunter* (1934). Gibbon's choice of living in Welwyn Garden City is interesting, in that its creation was part of utopian town planning movements of the early twentieth century. In conclusion, I argue that the Scottish 'take' on the globe is one of ecological lyricism which fuses universal and local geographies. It is thus emphatically local and global concerns, rather than 'national' ones *per se*, which become the key to understanding the work of these inter-war Scottish writers, and of many who follow them.

Following on from such issues of locality and international awareness, Chapter 4, 'Belonging and Displacement', suggests that a group of

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[54] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'The Land'. *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*. London: Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., 1934. pp.292-306.

Scottish writers which includes Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown have tended to be seen as peripheral by recent models of Scottish literature, which often foreground urban writing with a clearer international appeal. However, in an age of environmental awareness, these 'peripheral' writers are in fact central and of international relevance, as well as literary quality. Displacement, as a condition of modernity, has now been recognised as ecological, as well as cultural. Muir's writing acknowledges both viewpoints, and sees them as intrinsically linked. Making use of psychoanalytic theory, he sets up an opposition between mythic origin and conceptual homelessness which is based on personal experience, but which develops into an interrogation of modern preconceptions of human-nature relationships, showing the distortions of what 'pastoral' may mean in modern experience, and arguing for the centrality of animals and agriculture to modern human civilisation. His reaction involves the exploration of 'conceptual homes' (an idea which John Burnside is interested in) which offset ideals of integration and reconnection against symbols of modernity and technology. His famous cold-war poem, 'The Horses' can thus be read as an ecological narrative. In contrast to Muir's horror of technology, I examine the synthesis of scientific knowledge and poetic imagery in work by Nan Shepherd, Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid, highlighting the crucial idea that

'knowledge does not dispel mystery' in Shepherd's work, and relate this to MacDiarmid, whose 'mature art' also takes this position.

MacDiarmid's interest in both Gaelic poetry and scientific discoveries is viewed in the context of Sorley MacLean's argument for the essential faculty of 'realism' in Gaelic poetry, which provides new perspectives on the environment which are not falsely sentimental.[55] MacDiarmid produces verse translations of Ban MacIntyre's poetry, and writes some poems depicting imagined one-sided 'conversations' with the poet, both of which are heavily reliant on the work of the ecologist of the Highlands and Islands, Frank Fraser Darling. In this way, MacDiarmid is suggesting the existence of a link between older Scottish literature, his own work, and the work of modern environmental science. MacDiarmid's use of scientific terminology is employed both for its imagist properties - as 'phenomenological reverberation' - as well as for its value in concrete observation.[56] Imagism's call for the 'direct treatment of the thing'[57] - a possibility which is also valued by MacDiarmid - recalls phenomenological ideals of apprehending the 'thing-in-itself' by discovering authentic ways of 'being-in-the-world' by the breakdown of

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[55] Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean. 'On Realism in Gaelic Poetry'. Ris a' Bhruthaich: *Criticism and Prose Writings*. Ed. William Gillies. Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985.
[56] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p.xxvii
[57] F.S. Flint, cited in John T. Gage. *In the arresting eye : the rhetoric of imagism*. Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, c1981.

Cartesian oppositions between subject and object, mind and nature - again, concepts which are of central importance in contemporary Scottish writing. Edwin Morgan has observed that MacDiarmid's poetry of knowledge relates closely to Wordsworth's prediction that science would become 'the proper object of the Poet's Art'.[58] Morgan's stance, and his characterisation of MacDiarmid's poetry in biological metaphor, anticipates modern ecocritical perspectives such as that of Jonathan Bate. I argue that, in fact, MacDiarmid's poetry of knowledge is a means of negotiating ways of 'dwelling', and as such has some similarities with Bate's idea of 'ecopoetics'. Such narratives of reconnection become even more crucial in the 1960s, with the growth of the 'green' movement in America and Europe following the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.

Though the 1960s might seem to bring about the dislodging of the age of MacDiarmid and Muir, in fact the 1960s 'countercultures' are linked ecological-minded aspects of writing in earlier twentieth-century Scotland, and this becomes evident from the work of writers as diverse as Edwin Morgan, Archie Hind and George Mackay Brown. Such new movements provided an outlet for these older aspects of Scottish culture,

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[58] William Wordsworth, quoted by Edwin Morgan in 'Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's Later Work'. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey*. Ed. Duncan Glen. Edinburgh & London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972.

which could now be situated within an international discourse attuned to green issues. Global eco-political movements, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, brought together Scottish cultural figures in surprising ways, bridging generations and aesthetic disagreements. American writers with an explicitly 'green' agenda in the 60s, including Rachel Carson, Gary Snyder, and Leo Marx, are signifiers of changing attitudes to literature and ecology. The apparent ideological rift between urban and rural writing in this period, with Archie Hind and Robert McLellan producing urban-realist works with a politically hard edge which seem set in opposition to the 'green fables' of the island writers, Iain Crichton Smith and George Mackay Brown, is, I argue, superficial. While it is important to recognise that the majority of the population lives in urban zones, the position of seeing urban writing as central and ecological writing as peripheral is a false one during this period. Ecological thought – both political and philosophical – is important in the work of both urban and rural writers. For example, Archie Hind's novel *The Dear Green Place* is as much about environmental impact and rurality as it is about urban experience. In this way, such writers engage with the implicit contrast between pastoral 'origins' and urban modernity which earlier literary figures like Edwin Muir had highlighted. Hind's novel blurs the categories of 'country' and 'city', and is in many ways a novel

about a boy's relationship with a river – a distorted, post-war reflection of Neil Gunn's *Highland River*.

Equally, rural environments during this period are shown not to be 'pure' repositories of 'traditional' culture but are affected by the processes of modernity. Iain Crichton Smith, however, criticises the urban environment as 'a land where people no longer feel at home' but in doing so suggests that 'home' is not a mythological abstraction as it often is for Muir, but a 'real place'.[59] George Mackay Brown's work, despite criticism levelled at its supposedly nostalgic or pastoral character, aims at the representation of an ecologically significant, 'real place' which is under threat. *Greenvoe*'s opposition to the intrusion of sinister technology which disrupts both local communities and ancient rural traditions, provides an environmental warning which is entirely in keeping with the writings of environmentalists such as Rachel Carson. Mackay Brown's novels and poetry speak of a connection with the natural world which defies, rather than denies, the intrusion of technology. Brown is not the end of a tradition, but part of an ongoing process in Scottish literature which recognises the importance of myth and tradition – the historical dimension of the environment. Admiration for George Mackay Brown's

[59] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Real People in a Real Place'. *Towards the Human: Selected Essays*. Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1986. p.43

work by a younger generation of writers which includes Seamus Heaney, Douglas Dunn, John Burnside, and Kathleen Jamie is based on his intelligent and attentive use of poetic language both to represent and to defend the Orkneys as a distinct and important environment.

The potential for poetry and writing more generally to provide such a 'line of defence' is the basis for my final chapter, on the contemporary Scottish writers John Burnside, Kathleen Jamie and Alan Warner. These younger Scottish writers are not only reviewing human relationships with nature, but also the role writing has to play in exploring and strengthening such relationships - helping to determine the ecological 'value' of poetry and fiction. The main contention of Chapter 5 is that contemporary poetry, and lyricism more generally, constitute an ecological 'line of defence' - providing a space in which reader and author can examine their relationship to the world around them. What these young Scottish writers share in common is a lucid and intelligent lyrical vision which seeks to re-centre and redefine concepts of nature and rural environments. In an age of environmental crisis, which also suffers from attendant postmodern anxieties about globalisation, corporatisation and loss of cultural or natural heritage, such literary projects are not only relevant, but crucial. Burnside and Jamie argue that the main priority for contemporary writing is to explore the relationship

we have with the natural world. A reverence for details and objects based on phenomenological and existential philosophies is central to the ecological 'vision' of these contemporary writers. Kathleen Jamie stresses the importance of the poet's 'quality of attention' which she argues is a way of 'maintaining the web of our noticing, a way of being in the world'.[60]

'Being in the world' is of course a philosophical term employed by Martin Heidegger to emphasise ideals of authentic contact with and integration in the world around us.[61] Ideals of 'being in the world' or attaining access to the 'thing-in-itself' mean that precision in poetic language becomes very important. Heidegger suggests that the human condition is one of intrinsic 'homelessness', and that the search for a true home, for a way of 'dwelling' on the earth, is central to human experience.[62] Burnside's reading of Heidegger suggests that acknowledging and thinking about the problem of homelessness brings us closer to authenticity, closer to the possibility of 'home'. I argue in this final chapter that this ecological philosophy of 'home' is what John Burnside has been pursuing throughout his literary career. 'Home', for Scottish

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[60] Kathleen Jamie. 'Diary'. *London Review of Books*. Vol.24 No.11. 6th June 2002. p.39
[61] See George Pattison. *The Later Heidegger*. Routledge Philosophy Guidebook. London: Routledge, 2000.
[62] See Martin Heidegger. 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971.

writers, has taken on new meanings, beyond the questions of 'nationalism' or 'Scottishness'. Burnside's search for a meaningful identity which 'sets terrain and habitat before tribal allegiance' is evidence of this.[63] Questions of 'home' and 'belonging' are, for Burnside, the central concerns of ecological philosophy.

Informed by his reading of Heidegger, Burnside is haunted by the possibilities of 'dwelling', of an authentic way of 'being in the world'. Modern 'homes', and specifically the suburbs, are explored in Burnside's poetry as ambivalent places with shifting identities which are both homely and unhomely. The suggestion that suburbs and modern environments are 'non-places'[64] is belied in both Burnside's and Jamie's poetry by a careful attention to detail, and markers of modern existence are 'othered' in the work of Alan Warner, whose Highland landscapes achieve their numinous aspect only through the environmental impact of human settlement. What becomes important for all three writers is the questioning of the categories of 'self' and 'other' which tend to inform human relationships with the natural world. Such boundaries are constantly collapsed or rendered ambiguous in these writers' representations of individuals and the natural world. By deliberately

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[63] John Burnside interviewed by Louisa Gairn, 31 March, 2004. n.pag.
[64] Marc Auge. *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity.* Trans. John Howe. London: Verso, 1995.

blurring the gaps between 'self' and 'other', 'human' and 'nature', Burnside, Jamie and Warner invite the reader to join them in deconstructing these binary oppositions, which they feel are misleading and constrictive, exploring the liminal world which exists at the edges of such categories. The 'liminal' or the 'borderline' has long been an important concept for post-colonial theory, giving a voice to the marginalised racial or geographical 'other', and it is clear that a similar process can be applied to the natural world, which has been similarly marginalised, exploited or 'spoken for' in modern Western societies. Burnside is aware of these theoretical implications, pointing out the correspondences between ecological theory and the post-structuralist discourses of post-colonialism and feminism.

Gaston Bachelard has argued for the ability of poetry to 'restore us to the object', to 'restore us to this sense of ourselves as "creatures", as subjects beyond the conventional limits of subject and object' - a phenomenological philosophy which is taken up in the work of both Jamie and Burnside.[65] Jamie breaks down these oppositions by showing correspondences between female bodies and the natural world, while Burnside uses doubles and doppelgängers to achieve the same effect.

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[65] Gaston Bachelard, quoted in Mary McAllester Jones. *Gaston Bahelard, Subversive Humanist: Texts and Readings.* Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. p.157

Warner plays with traditional associations of the Highlands with Barbarism, as the 'other' of civilisation, bringing barbarity into the orbit of civilisation, recognising the 'other' as an intrinsic part of one's familiar home ground, even of the self. Jamie's approach to all this is more 'democratic' than Burnside's, whose focus on the figure of the loner or the drifter suggests a more isolated approach to relating to the natural world. While Burnside's work has been criticised by some for its repetition of imagery and theme, subtle changes are apparent. The work of both Burnside and Jamie has been changed by their experiences of parenthood, which provokes a heightened sense of the fragility and temporality of natural landscapes, as well as a heightened need to reconnect with the environment. Ultimately this leads to a recognition by contemporary Scottish writers that the search for ways of 'tuning in' to the natural world are crucial, and that the reading and writing of literature which explores such questions provide a vital space for the consideration of possible answers.

Chapter 1:
Feelings for Nature in Victorian Scotland

> The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.[1]
>
> ...action is a more intimate and inseparable property of our constitution than any of our sensations, giving them the character of compounds while itself is a simple and elemental property.[2]

Alexander Bain described his groundbreaking psychological treatise, *The Senses and the Intellect*, published just four years before Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), as a 'first attempt to construct a natural history of the feelings'.[3] 'Feeling', in the Romantic period, had come to be associated with the emotions evoked by aesthetic or sentimental subjects, famously characterised by Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, or the contemplation of the picturesque or the sublime in novels such as Walter Scott's *Waverley* or in the poetry of William Wordsworth. However, Bain's scientific approach to sensation and perception is remarkable in its emphasis on bodily movement, and its novel way of thinking about experiences which had, until then, been the preserve of the Romantic poet. For example, his study theorises the aesthetic experience of the

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. C. Smith, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962. p.82
[2] Alexander Bain. *The Senses and the Intellect*. London: John W. Parker & Son, 1855. p.67
[3] *Ibid.* p.vi

'sublime', or the pleasure to be obtained from touching rocks when mountain-climbing.[4] Perhaps most interestingly, his conception of the 'emotional sensibility of muscle'[5] foreshadows the attitudes expressed by phenomenological philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard, who in the mid-twentieth century wished to understand 'the psychology of each muscle'[6], or Maurice Merleau-Ponty who suggested 'that the body is given in movement, and that bodily movement carries its own immanent intentionality. . . the subject's action is, at one and the same time, a movement of perception'. [7]

The mixed connotations of the term 'feeling' in the post-Romantic period are suggested in the work of many Scottish writers of the mid-late nineteenth century. On travelling across the wilderness landscape of North America by railroad, Stevenson describes what might seem at first sight a Romantic landscape:

> It was a clear, moonlit night; but the valley was too narrow to admit the moonshine direct, and only a diffused glimmer whitened the tall rocks and relieved the blackness of the pines. A hoarse clamour filled the air; it was the continuous plunge of a cascade somewhere near at hand among the mountains. The air struck chill, but tasted good and vigorous in the nostrils - a fine,

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[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 173 & 249.
[5] Bain, p.107
[6] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space.* (1958) Trans. Maris Jolas, 1964. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p.91
[7] Tim Ingold. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill.* London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p.170

> dry, old mountain atmosphere. I was dead sleepy, but I returned to roost with a grateful mountain feeling at my heart.

This passage, an interlude from Stevenson's travels westwards across North America, evokes what may seem to be a commonplace sentiment about the natural world, the idea of the restorative properties of a natural landscape on a passive beholder – an idea which had been first developed during the Romantic period, with its emphasis on the aesthetic categories of the 'sublime' and the 'beautiful'. The mountain landscape, with its crags, cascades and woodlands, may seem a typical scene for Romantic musings, however Stevenson's writing relishes the animal or birdlike sensation of 'returning to roost', laced with a hint of irony which makes this mountain scene Post-Romantic. This sense of irony, together with his emphasis on the olfactory experience of the 'mountain atmosphere' rather than a visual experience of a landscape here only discernible by a 'diffused glimmer' of moonshine, appears to place physicality firmly at the centre of nature experience. Can one discern, in the cultural productions of late nineteenth-century Scotland, a change in attitude to the natural world, distinct from their Romantic forerunners? What is it about the wild landscape that makes Stevenson – and other Scottish Victorians – feel better?

Another one of those Scottish Victorians attempted to answer that very question. In *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry* (1887), published the year after Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, John Veitch undertook an ambitious critical survey of Scottish poetry's treatment of 'Nature' - as theme, aesthetic category and moral influence. Veitch, born in the Borders in 1829, held a professorship at the University of St Andrews before becoming Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at the University of Glasgow from 1864 until his death in 1894, and was President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (1892-94). He also published a study of Borders culture, with heavy emphasis on the influence of the Borders landscape on its inhabitants, entitled *History and Poetry of the Scottish Border* (1878) - ordered by Stevenson during his residence in the South Seas, along with other books he wanted sent from home.[8]

Veitch's aims in his *Feeling for Nature* suggest a historical, evolutionary, tenor to his analysis of Scottish nature appreciation:

> I wished to know how far one's feeling for nature had been shared in by other people before the present time, - how it had grown up possibly from small beginnings or lower forms, and become what it now is, to some men at least. It is a matter of curious speculation to find how the same scenes in the past affected people centuries ago, - whether it was in precisely the same way as now, - if not, how far and in what modes different, - and if there has been

[8] Veitch also published three collections of poetry with a Borders interest: *Hillside Rhymes* (1872), *'The Tweed' and other poems* (1875) and *'Merlin' and other poems* (1889)

> growth, accretion of richness, how that has taken place, or in modern though not unobjectionable phraseology, been evolved.[9]

As part of this effort, he attempts to trace the history of aesthetic reactions to the natural landscape in Western culture – a sort of natural history of nature appreciation. Veitch traces a development in 'nature feeling' from the 'organically agreeable' phase, which Veitch describes as a state of 'open-air feeling...connecting itself with a consciousness of life and sensuous enjoyment'[10], to the appreciation of cultivated nature, which is a form of utilitarian aesthetics, delighting in man's 'victory over nature' which, through its 'mingling of material and aesthetic feeling' has proved 'incalculably hurtful and degrading' to humankind, since it denies access to the 'noble and purifying aesthetic feeling' which may be gleaned from an appreciation of traditional wildernesses.[11] Although 'wilderness' had been applied to Scotland's landscapes in a derogatory sense, the description began to assume the character of purity and grandeur, doubtless through the influence of proponents of the American wilderness. John Campbell Shairp, Veitch's mentor at St Andrews, bemoaned the construction of the railway through the Cairngorms,

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[9] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*. Vol I. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1887. p.5
[10] *Ibid.* p.11
[11] *Ibid.* p.13

reflecting that the region 'is a wilderness no more'.[12] The highest form of nature feeling, according to Veitch, is 'free [and] pure' where nature is 'the direct, absolute source of gratification':

> The reaching of this stage of feeling marks a great advance in civilisation. And it is only possible, as a general national characteristic, after agriculture and the arts have progressed to such a degree as to make men feel that they are no longer in daily struggle with earth and elements. ...The war between the wants of man and the forces of nature has ceased, or man is in the daily consciousness of being the master – of having his physical needs supplied; and now he has time, opportunity, and leisure for that free, pure pleasure – to listen to that still small voice that solicited him from the first, but which was lost in the bustle of daily toil...[13]

The end product of civilisation, it seems, is gentlemanly 'leisure', albeit a recreation which involves paying heed to the 'still small voice', the presence of God, or the suggestion of transcendent morality to be found in the natural world. Although Veitch wants to highlight the numinous properties of nature revealed to the modern enlightened man, his rhetoric of 'gratification', 'physical needs' and 'mastery' run against this latent strain of Romanticism, and suggest instead the needs of the body and the requirements of a society for which Nature has been commodified, by the empire of man over natural resources. So what sort of sensibilities does Veitch privilege in Scottish nature poetry? Arguing for a Romantically-derived conception of nature appreciation, Veitch identifies the

[12] Robert A. Lambert. *Contested mountains : nature, development and environment in the Cairngorms region of Scotland, 1880-1980.* Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001. p.24
[13] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry.* Vol I. pp.14-15

imagination as the main conduit for experience and understanding. The 'Symbolic Imagination' allows:

> that power of insight into the world of outward nature, which sees in things the expression of intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities; fuses, so to speak, the unconscious life of nature and the conscious life of man in the unity of feeling, communion, sympathy. It is not merely a process of impersonation under excited emotion. It is the power under the influence of love and holy passion, of 'seeing into the life of things'. It is this symbolical Power alone which can fuse the dualism of Man and Nature. For speculative thought this opposition must always subsist; for the Symbolical Imagination there is a common life in the two great spheres of Humanity and the World; and finally, even a community of life and thought, with the Power which transcends all, yet lives in all.[14]

At first sight, this attitude appears to confirm the Cartesian dualistic view of nature, where 'conscious', rational man is the master of 'unconscious', unthinking nature, whose workings were likened by Descartes to that of a mere automaton. But there is hope, Veitch insists, through the exercise of the 'Symbolical Imagination' which allows the Wordsworthian ideal of 'see[ing] into the life of things' - an argument taken from Wordsworth's poem about *Tintern Abbey*.[15] However, Veitch's theory of the power of the imagination recalls Coleridge's idea of the 'Primary Imagination' in his *Biographia Literaria*, which he considered 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite of the

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[14] *Ibid.* p.68

[15] William Wordsworth. 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey'. (1798) *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Nicholas Roe. London: Penguin Books, 1992. pp. 76-80 (p.77)

eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'.[16] Coleridge's philosophy was also a powerful influence on Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose transcendentalist philosophy became popular in the United States with the publication of *Nature* in 1836. However, Veitch's approach appears to be less self-centred than that, and arguably less anthropocentric, stressing the possibility of 'community' between humanity and the natural world, a vision of fusing the two spheres which has at least an inkling of ecological sensibility. This is indeed similar in many ways to the writings of Emerson, who speaks of the existence of a 'radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts'.[17] Veitch, though, does not go quite so far as to posit the existence of an 'occult relation between man and the vegetable'.[18] Instead, he seems to be equally interested in the physical properties of natural objects as an end in themselves, with a role in the everyday life of man, whose practicalities do not always allow for musings of a more spiritual character. Positing the existence of a network between mental space and physical nature, Veitch seems to suggest that the viewing eye imaginatively constructs nature through acts of perception, gaining access to a higher truth which binds together the physical and the abstract, both of which the natural world represents.

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[16] Quoted in James McKusick. *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. London: MacMillan Press, 2000. p. 116

[17] Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'Nature'. *The Complete Works*. Vol.I. New York: The Riverside Press, 1903. p. 29

[18] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*. Vol I. p. 10

Certainly this opposition between physical nature and spiritual significance is a point of tension within Veitch's thinking, and one which he repeatedly attempts to negotiate with varying degrees of success. Here, Veitch seems to be attempting, in his study of Scottish nature poetry, to reconcile his physical enjoyment of the land with a set of moral and aesthetic theories regarding the natural world, deriving from his reading of the Romantic poets, and his philosophical studies. Veitch feels he must acknowledge the validity of science and the study of the physical world as forms of knowledge about nature, and as part of the 'feeling for nature' he identifies in contemporary culture, but he is never entirely comfortable with employing this set of assumptions. Indeed, although his Darwinian rhetoric is notable, with talk of 'lower forms', 'evolution' and 'heredity', it is clear he is somewhat uneasy about employing it, keen to make use of the Christian terminology of 'The Creation' and references to a 'higher power' present through the appreciation of a morally significant, numinous 'Nature'. [19]

However, despite his misgivings, Veitch clearly finds his theory of heredity persuasive, suggesting in both critical studies the possibility of biological inheritance as a determining factor in nature appreciation:

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[19] *Ibid.* pp. 3-5

> As to the heredity I have some sort of dim faith, and I can hardly believe otherwise than that somehow those manor and Tweeddale glens have had a gradually educating and moulding effect on the many generations of the men who lived before me there, and from whom I come, and that my present state of feeling is somehow due to the earth and sky visions with which they were familiar.[20]

This notion of the experience of natural landscape being transmitted in the blood of its inhabitants is expressive of the beginnings of environmental theory, and foreshadows much of early twentieth-century writing about the interconnection between land and communities. The 'moulding' effect of the natural world upon the Borders people was also explored by Veitch in *The History and Poetry of the Scottish Border*, where he explains this theory with special reference to Borders literature:

> ...natural features help to make and mould the character of the people, and, directly or indirectly, give a cast and colouring to those feelings, fancies and imaginings that find outlet in song and ballad.[21]

The 'greywacke heights and haughs' of the Borders country have produced a race of 'hardy, sinewy men',[22] with the ancient Gaels and Cymri appearing as proto-mountaineers, loving the manifestations of 'Stern nature' whose 'might and mass of mountain [was] their natural

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[20] *Ibid.* p. 3
[21] John Veitch. *History and Poetry of the Scottish Border.* Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1878. p. 3
[22] *Ibid.* pp. 6-7

protection' - rather than the fertile plains which the classical poets privileged in their verses. [23]

> No doubt a series of tragic incidents may give a prevailing tone to the feeling and the poetry of a district, apart in a great measure from the character of the scenery. But I cannot help thinking that in this case the nature of the scenery has a great deal to do in predisposing the imagination to a melancholy case, and thus fitting the mind for receiving and retaining, if not originating the tragic or pathetic creation. This influence, too, might be wholly an unconscious one for many generations. It would thus affect the singer without his knowing it...[24]

Veitch's peculiar form of Darwinism was also employed by his fellow mountaineer and life long friend, Professor G.G. Ramsay, President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club at its inception in 1889, who argues in his consideration of the roots of Scottish mountaineering published in *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*:

> The fowler and the sportsman in the Highlands - still more the Islesman - have from time immemorial known and practised the art of finding their way up and down the most impracticable cliffs; and our forefathers have thus, I believe, handed down to us a steadiness of hand and eye, of foot and nerve, which are not equally the birthright of the southerner.[25]

Both seem convinced of the 'naturalness' of this perceived affinity with the Scottish hills, arguing that the capacity for nature appreciation or

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[23] *Ibid.* p. 61
[24] *Ibid.* p. 424
[25] G.G. Ramsay. 'The Formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club'. *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal.* IV (1896) pp. 73-91.

mountaineering is somehow embedded in the biology of individuals; a latent characteristic emerging only after successive generations; a hidden, unconscious personality trait; a collective biological memory of the Scottish landscape transmissible to the individual psyche. All this theorising would suggest an emergence of a newly physical ideology of nature appreciation.

Indeed, Veitch opens his study with an appeal to a childlike approach to the natural world – an approach which is rooted in physical sensation. Speaking of the 'unalloyed delight' he took as a boy in the characteristic Borders landscape, Veitch speculates on the importance of naïve feeling:

> Why, I thought to myself, why not love the bracken, the bent, and the heather? These were then the dear things to me ... I did not then know or ask anything about the causes or the reasonableness of my feelings. I was content to live in the world of simple and spontaneous enjoyment. And if this would but continue through life, I almost feel sure that human joy, if not blessedness, would be at its full.[26]

Although Veitch does not problematise this 'simple and spontaneous enjoyment' of nature, his boyhood 'feeling for nature' is ambiguous, partly an aesthetic reaction, partly an emotional connection to the local and, retrospectively, national landscape, partly enjoyment in the bodily experience of exploring that landscape – an enjoyment which is

[26] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*. p. 3

unsexualised and pre-Freudian. 'Feelings', in the child, are not sub-divided into emotion and sensation, or the culturally loaded sense of nature aesthetics Veitch goes on to outline later in the study. This attitude bears some resemblance to Emerson's neo-Wordsworthian views on the subject:

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward sense are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.[27]

Veitch does indeed seem to be aware of the division between innocence and experience in understanding human 'feelings for nature', or of 'Idealism' and 'Materialism', as Emerson might phrase it. However, the 'innocent' perception of the child is still one of physical enjoyment. Veitch seems to value the more basic response of the child, a feeling for nature rooted in the here and now, which encourages a form of poetry which is 'simple, outward, direct ... true to feelings of the human heart'.[28] As a published authority on the literary representations of the Scottish natural landscape, and in his role as President of The Scottish Mountaineering Club whose interest was focused on the active clambering of middle-class Victorians in that Scottish landscape, Veitch

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[27] Emerson. *Nature*. p. 9
[28] John Veitch. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*. p. 3

seems peculiarly positioned as mediator between the two realms of nature experience - aesthetic and athletic. How can these seemingly oppositional modes of negotiating the natural world be reconciled? And what sort of 'feeling' does this dualistic activity encourage or represent?

The period from the 1850s until the end of the century saw the activity of mountaineering become increasingly popular. At first, practitioners of the sport were few, however eventually a group of British mountaineers formed themselves into the first association, The Alpine Club, in 1857. Alpine exploits were popularised by the publication of 'Peaks, Passes and Glaciers'(1861), a collection essays written by Alpine Club members cataloguing their exploits on the European mountains. Perhaps the most famous member of the Alpine Club, and possibly the most accomplished Victorian mountaineer, was Sir Leslie Stephen, editor of *The Cornhill Magazine* and future editor of the Dictionary of National Biography, who published his account of his Alpine adventures as *The Playground of Europe* in 1871. Other well-received narratives of Alpine conquest include Edward Whymper's *Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-69* (1871), and John Tyndall's *Mountaineering in 1861* (1862). Indeed, such was the popularity of these bourgeois adventurings that Whymper was forced to take out a copyright on his 1871 title, in order to prevent another mountaineer from stealing his 'scrambling' thunder. The

outdoors clubs were no less prolific in their memberships than the lists of contributors to magazines such as *The Cornhill.* However, perhaps the most popular proponent of this new endeavour was a rather unlikely character. Mountaineering was propelled into the public imagination by Albert Smith, journalist and showman, who made a living out of travelling to exotic destinations and returning to lecture large audiences at home. In 1851 he made an extravagant and well-publicised ascent of Mont Blanc, and in the following year he mounted a one man show at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly - a hugely popular (and lucrative) enterprise which ran for seven years. The Alps and mountaineering had certainly been brought to public attention, but perhaps without the proper reverence some might have preferred. Mont Blanc, which had been the subject of Byronic musings, was now reduced to what *The Times* described as 'a mere theatrical gimcrack'.[29] This demystification of the mountains was received somewhat frostily by more genteel mountain admirers - 'There has been a cockney ascent of Mont Blanc,' Ruskin drily observed in a letter to a friend, and others were similarly uneasy about the popularisation of their privileged Alpine arena.[30] But if these mountaineers were concerned about the demystification of the Alps as

[29] Peter H. Hansen. 'Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain.' *Journal of British Studies.* 34 (1995) 300-324. p. 308

[30] *Ibid.* p. 308

Romantic landscape, their newly invented sport was surely complicit in this changing attitude.

A number of other clubs followed in the wake of the Britons' success, with the formation of the Swiss Alpine Club and the first American mountaineering club in 1863, followed by a number of European clubs in the 60s and 70s. It is notable how many nineteenth-century mountaineers were Classicists; the *mens sana in corpore sano* ethic suggested by the study of classical literature certainly found an outlet in the activities of these outdoors clubs and associations. The Scottish Mountaineering Club was founded in 1889 as a result of a correspondence in the letters page of the *Glasgow Herald* between Professor G.G. Ramsay, Professor of Humanity at Glasgow University (1863-1906) and one Mr Naismith, who proposed to set up a 'Scottish Alpine Club' in imitation of the extremely popular Alpine Club across the Border. Ramsay had formed the Cobbler club, which he describes as the first Scottish mountaineering club, along with Veitch and another student in their days at Edinburgh university, but there were few broad-based outdoors organisations in Scotland at the time of this correspondence. Naismith described mountaineering as 'one of the most manly as well as healthful and fascinating forms of exercise' and contended that it was 'almost a disgrace to any Scotsman whose heart and lungs are in proper order if he is not more or less of a

mountaineer, seeing that he belongs to one of the most mountainous countries in the world'.[31] Later, in his first presidential address to the newly formed club, Ramsay would speak of the 'love of the hills' as being 'implanted in the heart of every Scot as part of his very birthright', reviving Veitch's inheritance theory by contending that 'our mountains have been the moulders of our national character'.[32] Ramsay is quick to explain the English ascendancy in the sport, claiming that England's 'dull flats drove them in sheer desperation to seek for heights elsewhere' whereas since in Scotland, 'every man has his hill or mountain at his door; every man is potentially a mountaineer; and a mountaineering club, in its simple sense, must thus have included nothing less than the entire nation'.[33] The members of the Scottish club recognise a need to foster a love of the Scottish landscape.

> We have thus already done something to bring home to the hearts and minds of our fellow countrymen the fact that we have here, in our Highland hills, the most delightful and inspiring playground that is to be found from one end of Europe to the other...[34]

Ramsay is certainly writing with Leslie Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* in mind here, but to apply that rhetoric to one's native 'national'

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[31] G.G. Ramsay. 'The Formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club'. *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal.* Vol. IV (1896). p. 82
[32] G.G. Ramsay. 'The President's Address.' *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal.* Vol. I (1891), pp. 1-11
[33] *Ibid.* p. 2
[34] G.G. Ramsay. 'The Formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club' p. 81

landscape is perhaps a more risky business than at first it seems – especially considering the devastating clearances which made the Highlands into the 'delightful' sporting arena Ramsay describes. In addition to its status as a sport, mountaineering had become, by this stage in the century, a form of expertise, 'a science of a highly complex character, cultivated by trained experts, with a vocabulary, an artillery, and rigorous methods of its own'.[35]

It had been made into this 'rigorous science' by the Alpine Club, of which Ramsay's brother was a prominent member, making one of the many Alpine Club ascents of Mont Blanc in 1854. It was widely acknowledged that mountaineering in the Alps was inspired by the work of James Forbes, the Scots glaciologist who had been a friend of Veitch's during their university years.[36] Forbes's pioneering study of the Alpine glaciers was published as *Travels through the Alps of Savoy* in 1843. The scientific aspect of the club's activities are evidenced by the dual urge not only to climb mountains, but to gain a greater understanding of their physical properties, encouraging the practice of mapping and photography, as well as geological. Mountaineers, like their counterparts in the military and the missions, were performing a dual function, largely in the service

[35] G.G. Ramsay 'President's Address' p.3
[36] John Ball (Ed.) *Peaks, passes and glaciers: a series of excursions by members of the Alpine Club.* London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859.p.v

of the Royal Geographical Society. They were mapping the Alpine region just as Livingstone was revealing the secrets of the African interior, and the naval explorers of the Artic were opening up the possibility of new trade routes. This form of scientific research privileged firsthand experience over observation from a distance:

> The premise of the Alpine Club aesthetic was that only traversing the rock face, inching his way up ice steps, enabled the climber, at rest, to see the mountain as it truly was. And once he had experienced all this, it became imprinted on his senses in ways totally inaccessible to the dilettante, low-altitude walker.[37]

Physical activity then, in contrast to Romantic spectatorship, became a way of accessing the 'truth' about the natural world.

But this 'truth' was a privileged discourse, open only to those with the expertise, health and wealth necessary to attain it. The ideologies which underlie the practice of mountaineering appear tangled and confused. How far is this fascination with the hills just a product of Romanticism, and how far can it be read as a symptom of a new trend in nineteenth century attitudes to the environment? Is mountaineering just another form of Victorian 'recreational colonialism', part of the establishment which cleared out Highland crofters and replaced them with gaudily tartaned deer stalkers? A tacit imperialistic attitude was demonstrably

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[37] Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana Press, 1996. p.504

prevalent amongst members of the British Establishment throughout the greater part of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, with the Highland Clearances continuing well into the 1850s at least. The writings of that establishment culture, such as the works of Walter Scott, which, although by no means a monolith of cultural imperialism, had contributed to the propagation of a form of domestic orientalism; an attitude to the Highlands and their inhabitants which served to generalise and mythologise, subsuming Highland culture into an exotic unreality, containing it within the Romanticised past. The Scottish Mountaineering Club, like the Alpine Club before it, was indeed a form of exclusive gentlemen's club, which claimed to encourage a nationalistic brotherhood of mountaineers, but whose limited membership revolved to a certain extent around 'hotel holidays and black-tie dinners'.[38] Although the emphasis on the social trappings of the Club has no doubt decreased over the years, even now it is still by no means an 'equal opportunities' organisation, and in the nineteenth century it could indeed be seen as a sort of elite which exercised an orientalist attitude to landscape and inhabitants alike. [39] Certainly, the emergence of mountaineering in the middle of the nineteenth century can be read as the efforts of the bourgeois Victorian gentleman to establish a masculine identity, a sort of

[38] Robert A. Lambert. *Contested Mountains*. p. 37

[39] Women were only accepted into the Club in 1990, following extended debates. Currently, of a membership of 400, only six members are female. See http://www.smc.org.uk/about_us.htm [accessed 20 June 2004]

middle class imperialism which made up for the fact that most of these professionals were reduced to playing at empire rather than truly living it.

However, the cultural background of the mountaineering movement and associated hiking and rambling clubs of Britain and elsewhere, problematises this reading. Hiking and climbing clubs on the continent such as the Naturfreunde, or 'Nature Friends', established in 1895, were composed of 'socialists and anti-monarchists', associated with anti-establishment values, seeking to reappropriate the landscape from elitist landowners who prevented the use of the land by the working people.[40] Enacting a campaign they called 'the forbidden path', this Austrian-based group claimed the leisure rights of the upper classes for themselves, transplanting this ethic across the Atlantic to the United States around the turn of the century. Indeed, this reappropriation of 'forbidden' ground was enacted earlier in the century in the British Isles. This attitude finds its roots in the beginnings of the Rights of Way movement in Scotland by popular appeal to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Adam Black, in 1845 – just as John Veitch started his studies at the University of Edinburgh. The motion was proposed that:

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[40] Rebecca Solnit. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. p.150

> The citizens of Edinburgh have cause to complain of various encroachments on their rights of access to many rural localities of traditional interest and picturesque aspect which afforded innocent gratification to them and proved objects of attraction to strangers.[41]

Veitch joined the rights of way cause when popular discontent with the landowners of the Edinburgh area led to the formation of the Association for the Protection of Public Rights of Roadway, later to become The Scottish Rights of Way Society in 1885, with Black as its first President. Student resistance to the Duke of Atholl's attempts to deny public access to a newly enclosed commercial deer forest in the eastern Highlands in 1847 – the so-called 'Battle of Glen Tilt' - was the first active assertion of these rights, and was organised by John Balfour, Professor of Botany at the University of Edinburgh. Balfour, who is now chiefly remembered for designing the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, took up the cause of public access to private land with a certain impish enthusiasm. Atholl lost the resulting court battle, with the society calling upon the evidence of rural workers to confirm the existence of a traditional right of way through his land. The rights of way question was to be enlarged by the activities of the Liberal M.P. for South Aberdeen, James Bryce. Bryce, the son of a geologist, was himself an acclaimed international mountaineer, who had climbed in most of the major mountain regions in the world at

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[41] ScotWays, unpublished 'Briefing Notes: The Scottish Rights of Way Society 150th Anniversary' p.1

some time or another, and became President of the London-based Alpine Club in 1899. Between 1884 and 1908 he introduced a series of 'Access to the Mountains' Bills, calling for a right of access to 'uncultivated mountain or moorland' for 'purposes of recreation and scientific or artistic study'[42]. Bryce was affiliated with the radical side of the land access campaign, demonstrated by his presidency of the Cairngorm Club in 1889. Bryce, and the Cairngorm Club, recognised the increasing need for access to the countryside in an era of increasing industrialisation:

> The need for the opportunity of enjoying nature and places where health may be regained by bracing air and exercise and where the jaded mind can rest in silence and in solitude.[43]

In England, the question of access to the countryside had been brought to public attention by local groups such as the Association for the Protection of Ancient Footpaths founded in Yorkshire in 1824, in reaction to a parliamentary act allowing the closure of 'unnecessary' paths by landowners - and, no doubt, to the continued enclosure of the common grounds throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Commons Preservation Society, which helped to preserve the green spaces around London, was launched in 1865 by a group of intellectuals which included John Stuart Mill - the same group who were involved

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[42] Quoted in Robert A. Lambert. *Contested Mountains.* p.61
[43] *Ibid.* p.62

with the foundation of the National Trust in 1895, and campaigned for public access to the Lake District in the 1880s. Surely the ethos of the mountaineering clubs, with their rhetoric of freedom and exploration, and their emphasis on the opening up of 'new routes' across mountainous terrain - whether in Scotland or in Switzerland - would concur with this exercise of rights. Or would it?

If one looks at the Members' register of the Alpine Club in the thirty years following its formation in 1857, it becomes clear that the club was largely composed of 'professional' men, with the largest proportions taken up by lawyers, businessmen and teachers, and perhaps surprisingly, low numbers of members drawn from the military or the landed gentry. Members of the Alpine Club, like the Scottish Mountaineering Club, tended to be well-educated, mostly university graduates, and generally 'more likely to be Liberal dissenters than Tory Anglicans'.[44] If this is the case, then their outlook would tend to be more oriented towards the popular appropriation of the landscape than the closing off of that landscape by wealthy owners. Radical liberals, in the later nineteenth century, were associated with emergent forms of Scottish socialism, with the 'common principles' of 'temperance, pacifism, a belief in evangelical

[44] Peter H. Hansen. 'Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain'. *Journal of British Studies*. pp.310-311

religion, land reform, and Home Rule for Scotland'.[45] There were indeed a number of radicals hidden within the ranks of the Scottish mountaineering fraternity.

The landlordism prevalent in the mountainous regions of Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century impinged on the activities of humans and wildlife alike. Enclosure of land for country sports ensured that, as the environmental historian David Evans has pointed out, 'the survival or otherwise of Britain's fauna was determined predominantly by the landed proprietors and their gamekeepers. Britain became the most intensively gamekeepered country in the world'.[46] The activities of these gamekeepers, ghillies and factors on Highland estates constrained the lives of crofters and rural workers no less than the wildlife of these regions. The landlords and their wealthy guests were killing game on a scale unlike anything that had gone before, with literally thousands of grouse, deer and other animals shot each year, while their gamekeepers were exterminating huge numbers of wild animals which posed a threat to the jealously-guarded game - birds of prey, weasels, foxes, wildcats, badgers, otters, and pine martens – all species now protected by law.[47] It

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[45] T.M.Devine. *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000.* London: Penguin Books, 2000. p.305

[46] R. Perry cited in David Evans. *A History of Nature Conservation in Britain.* London & New York: Routledge, 1992. p.33

[47] T.C. Smout quotes the following statistical account from Osgood MacKenzie's Game Book in 1868: 'My total for that year was 1,314 grouse, 33 blackgame, 49 partridges, 110

should be noted that there is a Gaelic tradition of environmentally friendly gamekeeping, exemplified best, perhaps, by the eighteenth-century Gaelic poet and gamekeeper, Duncan Ban MacIntyre. However, throughout the nineteenth century, the crofting families who had lived for centuries on these West Highland estates, and depended upon access to the land for their livelihoods, were pushed more and more to the periphery. The typical croft was composed of a narrow strip of land, beginning on the hillside or 'black land' which provided grazing for livestock, and stretching down to the more fertile flat land, the 'coastal machair' or 'dune meadow' where the family grew their crops.[48] Altogether it was a fragile way of life, relying on subsistence farming and seasonal work in nearby towns. The 1880s saw the emergence of a generation of Scottish workers and political reformers in the Highlands and elsewhere who sought to challenge the traditional rights of landlordism, which had been carried out to their fullest and most brutal extent during the Highland Clearances – a process which continued well into the 1850s and in attenuated form into the 1870s by some accounts.[49] The 'Battle of the Braes' and other conflicts in the West of Scotland during

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golden plover, 35 wild ducks, 53 snipe, 91 rock-pigeons, 184 hares, without mentioning geese, teal, ptarmigan and roe etc., a total of 1,900 head. In other seasons I got as many as 96 partridges, 106 snipe and 95 woodcock.' *Nature contested: environmental history in Scotland and Northern Ireland since 1600.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. p.67

[48] James McCarthy. *An Inhabited Solitude: Scotland, Land and People.* Edinburgh: Luath Press Ltd,1998. p.104

[49] T.M. Devine *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000.* London: Penguin Books, 2000. p.304

the Crofter's War of the 1880s saw a new movement to reclaim the rights of the working people to the land which had been appropriated by landowners for the use of elitist recreation and sheep farming. This land use conflict was perceived as a re-emergence of the Highland threat in much of England and lowland Scotland, but gained public support in an era less forgiving of heavy-handed government tactics, as well as the backing of prominent intellectuals amongst the Scottish establishment. These included John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, and a contemporary of John Veitch. Blackie, who, like Veitch, studied both Scottish and Classical verse, producing his own study of national poetry, *Scottish song: its wealth, wisdom, and social significance* in 1889, held a genuine interest in both Gaelic culture (demonstrated by his campaign for the Chair of Celtic Literature at the University of Edinburgh) and Home Rule.[50]

Blackie's writings 'projected a potent message of literary romanticism and political radicalism' contingent with the emergent claims for the redistribution of land use – not least through his association with the Free Church of Scotland, which rejected patronage from the landed classes. [51] And the Free Kirk, of course, looked to its roots in the Covenanting

[50] His other publications include: *The Gaelic language: its classical affinities and distinctive character* (1864) and *The Union of 1707 and its results: a plea for Scottish home rule* (1892)
[51] T.M.Devine. *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000.* p.435

movement, whose religious meetings appropriated the use of the natural landscape in defiance of establishment authority. Veitch, like Blackie, was a member of this Church. Originally intending to join the ministry of the Free Church on his graduation, Veitch joined the ranks of the dissenters at the time of the 'Disruption' of the Scottish Kirk in 1843, and was admitted to the New College at Edinburgh University in 1845, which had just been created 'for the benefit of free-church students'.[52] He abandoned this project, turning instead to the study of theology and ultimately to philosophical theory, 'repelled by the dogmatic tendencies of the day'.[53] It is interesting to speculate upon Veitch's own feelings on the question of land rights, given his early association with liberal evangelical religion, backing of the controversial Rights of Way movement, his life-long affection for the Scottish landscape, and his interest in mountaineering. It may be possible to view him as the Borders equivalent of these other Highland campaigners: involved later in life, according to *D.N.B.*, with Peebleshire politics, and taking 'an active part in the leading border associations' – an area of the country no less constrained by the conflicting needs of landowner and hill walker – Veitch can be located at least on the periphery of this tradition.

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[52] *D.N.B.* entry.
[53] *Ibid.*

Henry George, champion of the People's cause in the Highlands, proclaimed in 1884 'the grand truth that every human being born in Scotland has an inalienable and equal right to the soil of Scotland – a right that no law can do away with, a right that comes from the Creator who made earth for man and placed him upon the earth'.[54] This declaration of 'rights' borrows some of its rhetoric from North American politics, but its claim was by no means secure, with the weight of the law, no matter how unjust it seemed to the crofters, firmly on the side of the landowner. 'Love of the hills' may, as G.G. Ramsay trumpeted, have been 'implanted in the heart of every Scot as part of his very birthright', but access to those hills was an entirely different matter when the wishes of the landlord had anything to do with it.

Blackie's critical study of the contemporary Highland situation, *The Scottish Highlands and the Land Laws: a historico-economical enquiry* (1885), attempts to voice the central problem of unacknowledged cultural differences between the ways in which Gaelic crofters and the British establishment viewed the natural landscape. The twin sources of Highland discontent, he alleged, were the imposition of:

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[54] Quoted in Donald E. Meek. (Ed.) *Tuath Is Tighearna – Tenants and Landlords: An Anthology of Gaelic Poetry of Social and Political Protest from the Clearances to the Land Agitation (1800-1890).* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995. p.129n

> economic theories alike unhuman and impolitic, and ... aristocratic pleasure-hunting which sowed the seeds of disaffection and stirred up class against class throughout the land.[55]

British law did not take into account the 'territorial traditions' of the Highland world, with the result that 'the rights of the landowners were held to be 'sacred,' [whilst] the rights of the tillers of the soil were neither sacred nor secular'. [56] Instead, Blackie contends:

> the whole Highlands are only a very small matter in the imagination of metropolitan legislators, not a few of whom are only too apt to look upon the whole region of trans-Grampian Scotland as only one grand playground and hunting field.[57]

Blackie is hostile to the sort of imperialistic rhetoric employed by the likes of Ramsay, but his assertion, as we have seen, is not entirely removed from the truth, with certain members of the mountaineering fraternity purporting to represent the interests of Scottish mountaineers, but at least tacitly supporting the vested interests of sporting landowners in the highlands, who, like Ramsay, describe rural Scotland as an 'exhilarating... playground'. The sort of 'love' which someone can nurture for a mere 'playground' is difficult to imagine as anything more than trivial and self-interested. Blackie, by contrast, also enjoyed Highland hillwalking, and spent his 'summer holidays among the breezy

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[55] John Stuart Blackie. *The Scottish Highlands and the Land Laws.* London: Chapman & Hall, 1885. p.ix
[56] *Ibid.* p.107
[57] *Ibid.* p.109

Bens of dear old Scotland at Braemar' in the Western Highlands - a holiday location which Stevenson was also to visit.[58] However, he combined these activities with an affection for the ordinary people who inhabited these remote areas:

> the yearly rambles which I continued to make into remote parts of the Highlands assumed more and more the character of a grave social duty going hand in hand with a healthy summer recreation.[59]

This latter-day Highland uprising employed different tactics and was characterised by a new 'proactive rather than reactive' political effort to mobilise public opinion and political legislation, which included the formation of the Highland Land Law Reform Association in the 1880s. This association became the Highland Land League in 1886, in imitation of the Irish Land League, whose more violent struggle with landlords on Irish soil resulted in eventual legislative success in 1881, with Gladstone's passing of the Irish Land Act. The crofters were to have their way eventually, with a Royal Commission headed by Lord Napier in 1883 and the passing of The Crofter's Holdings Act by Gladstone in 1886. The 'Land Question' was high-profile, partly due to the events across the Irish Sea, and partly due to the greater publicity available to the cause by the late nineteenth century, with Highland Associations springing up in

[58] *Ibid.* p.vii
[59] *Ibid.* p.ix

every major Scottish town, and the support of newspapers such as *The Oban Times*, which published political verses in Gaelic expressing the resentment and determination of the local people.[60]

A staunch supporter of James Bryce's Access to the Mountains bills, Blackie, too, had been involved in disputes over recreational access. In 1867 he climbed Buachaille Etive Mor near Fort William against the landowner's wishes. On arrival in Fort William he met up with Tyndall (of the Alpine Club) and the Fiscal who told him over a glass of port and a 'hearty laugh at the baffled deer-stalkers', that he was to be prosecuted for trespass.[61] One gets the distinct impression that the interests of frustrated landowners were viewed with amusement by a large section of society. Blackie's jocular verses in support of Bryce's campaign are expressive of this:

> Bless thee, brave Bryce! all Scotland votes with thee,
> All but the prideful and the pampered few,
> Who in their Scottish home find nought to do
> But keep our grand broad-shouldered Grampians free
> From tread of Scottish foot...[62]

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[60] See *Tuath Is Tighearna – Tenants and Landlords: An Anthology of Gaelic Poetry of Social and Political Protest from the Clearances to the Land Agitation (1800-1890).* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995.
[61] Robert Aitken. 'Stravagers and Marauders'. *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal.* Vol.30 (1972-75) 351-357. p.353
[62] *Ibid.* p.356

The matter was taken up with more seriousness by Gaelic writers, however. Land access and traditional rights of way were just as hotly contested in the Western Highlands. Some Gaelic poets spoke of the supposedly idyllic times when:

> Cha robh uisge no mòinteach
> Fodhìon no fo chòmhdach
> 'S bha saors' agus sòlas
> Aig òigridh na tìr
>
> Neither water nor moorland
> was banned or excluded,
> and freedom and goodness
> filled the youth of the land[63]

while others asserted more aggressively their sense of injustice at the obstruction of traditional rights of access. Although 'you deprived us of the rights of way/that the kindreds had from the beginning', the factor is told:

> An reachd a bh' againn cha trèig sinn,
> 'S cha leig sinn eug i dhar deòin,
> Dh'airdeoin bagradh a shèidear
> No thig 'nar dèidh air ar tòir;
> Siùbhlaidh sinn na cos-cheuman
> Mar bhios are feum a' toirt oirnn
>
> We will not forsake the law that we had,
> and we will not let it lapse willingly,
> in spite of whatever threat is breathed against us
> or comes in our pursuit;
> we will walk in the rights of way,
> just as our needs require us to do...[64]

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[63] Naill MacLeòid / Neil MacLeod. 'Na Croitearan Sgiathanach' / 'The Skye Crofters' ll.57-60. *Tuath Is Tighearna – Tenants and Landlords.* pp.102-104; trans. p. 224-226

Gaelic verses of this period, according to Sorley MacLean, are characterised by a 'great decline in full-bloodedness of matter'[65], unlike the poetry of Duncan Ban MacIntyre and Alexander MacDonald in the eighteenth century, which although 'splendid', displayed 'a relative unconcern with humanity'.[66] Nineteenth-century Gaelic poetry demonstrates that 'the ravages wrought on man are aggravated by ravages even on the face of nature' – something which Blackie had noticed and turned to political use in his 'historico-economical' enquiry into the Highland land question.[67] What they lose in immediacy to nature, they certainly gain in a sense of community, not just between local people, but of a correspondence between the plight of those at home, and people in more exotic locations, and the awareness of a parallel between the landscape and its inhabitants:

Mòr-shluagh na cruinne air èirigh,
Dh'ionnsaich an èiginn tuigse dhaibh;
Crìoch air gach cogadh is eucoir,
Is bràithrean gu lèir mar rugadh sinn.

Cuideachan Ghlaschu 's Dhun Edieann,
Cuideachdan Eirinn 's hunnainn leinn;
Duthaich is baile le chèile,
Muinntir tìr chèin – 's bidh a' bhuil orra.

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[64] Alasdair MacIlleathain / Alasdair MacLean. ' Duanag don Triùir Ghàidheal a thi'a nn am Priosan Dhun Eideann' / 'A Poem to the three Highlanders who are in the Edinburgh Prison' *Tuath Is Tighearna – Tenants and Landlords.* pp.119-121; trans. pp.234-236

[65] Sorley Maclean. 'The Poetry of the Clearances'. *Ris A' Bhruthaich: Criticism and Prose Writings.* Ed. William Gillies. Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985. p.57

[66] *Ibid.* p.57

[67] *Ibid.* p.63

> The population of the world has arisen;
> hardship has taught them understanding;
> there should be an end to every war and injustice,
> because we are all brothers as we were at birth.
>
> The societies of Glasgow and Edinburgh,
> the societies of Ireland and London support us;
> town and country stand together,
> along with the people of foreign lands - and results will follow.[68]

The Gaelic poets show an awareness of the internationalism of land rights, a sort of 'shall brithers be, for a' that' idea, commenting on the ruthlessness of landlord-businessmen who exploited the worker, whether he be Chinese opium addict or Scottish crofter. Thus physical needs and physical experiences, particularly those of hardship or peril, help to mould this sense of brotherhood or community. Sympathy, one of the values of Romanticism, is mediated through nature, as Wordsworth tried to prove through his project of 'natural language' in *The Prelude*.[69]

However, the crofting community's love of the soil, and their wish to remain in their traditional homelands, even in the face of extreme poverty and failing crops, was looked upon as faintly ridiculous and certainly irrational by most mercantile town-dwelling men who could visit the area for a hill walking holiday whenever they pleased. 'Solutions', in the form

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[68] Anonymous. '[Moladh Henry Seoras]' / '[In Praise of Henry George]'. ll. 25-32. *Tuath Is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords*. p.128; trans. p. 240

[69] William Wordsworth. *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*. Ed. Mark L. Reed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

of a one-way ticket across the Atlantic, or a better-paid occupation in the towns, were often refused, with crofters choosing the subsistence economy of time immemorial over the possibility of higher wages elsewhere. This preference had been remarked by Arthur Hugh Clough in *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich* (1848), in which a venerable crofter describes to a young undergraduate, 'How on his pittance of soil he lived', '...although he could get fine work that would pay, in the city, | Still was fain to abide where his father abode before him.' [70]

The logic behind this must have seemed abstruse to the *Self-Help* generation, schooled as it was in the '*ober dicta* of classical political economy', but then, the Lowland idea of mercantile economy propagated by Adam Smith, and the values of the British gentleman expounded by Samuel Smiles were not universally influential.[71] Smiles's writings were not particularly popular with the 'proletarian reader', and, as Smith himself knew, 'Gaelic Highlanders often refused to conform to the model of the Smithian man'.[72] Indeed, this 'land-preference', as T.C. Smout calls it, is perhaps not so surprising, when one considers that the actual standard of living for many in the industrial towns of Scotland, despite the perceptions of many, was little better if not considerably worse than

[70] Arthur Hugh Clough. *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich.* Ed. Patrick Scott. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976. V.ll.17-25
[71] T.C. Smout. *A Century of the Scottish People.* London: Collins, 1986. p.65
[72] *Ibid.* p.249; p.67

in rural areas.[73] Of course, there were exceptions to this trend, including David Livingstone's family, who gave up their croft on the Isle of Ulva and moved to Blantyre. It certainly provided Livingstone the chance to educate himself - snatched between long hours spent as a cotton spinner in a Lanarkshire factory - but his is an extraordinary story of 'Perseverance' which Samuel Smiles went on to celebrate as an exemplar of the *Self-Help* doctrine. The reality for many more would have been a cycle of poverty and deprivation without any of the consolations of the clean air and water of a rural location. It is at best ironic, and at worst, a downright injustice, that the gentleman mountaineer's 'love' for the Scottish soil he visited on holiday was lauded as a virtue and praised as a duty fulfilled, whilst the crofting tenant's sense of connection to the land - which was in any case more immediate and probably more genuine - was regarded as a nuisance which ought to be discouraged. It is therefore possible to see the rural-based land agitation of crofters in the Western Highlands, and the urban-based campaign for rights of way in the East, as essentially two sides of the same coin: a feeling for nature that demanded rights of access to the rural environment for the ordinary people of Scotland, not just the more privileged members of society.

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[73] *Ibid.* p.67

G.G. Ramsay notes, in his essay on the formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, how:

> district after district has been attacked, route after route projected and made out by our pioneers; how all Scotland has been laid under contribution – all, I believe, without once, on any occasion, interfering with the rights of farmers, or tenants, or proprietors, or giving rise to one unseemly altercation...[74]

Ramsay's rhetoric points to an ethos of militarism and conquest, employed elsewhere by British explorers and American frontiersmen. However, the Scottish landscape seems here to have been 'pioneered' with permission from its landowners. This wish to avoid 'unseemly altercations' between members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and landowners speaks of Ramsay's ethos of genteel sportsmanship, and seems to locate the practice of mountaineering within the same spectrum of outdoors activities as deer stalking and grouse shooting. Indeed, other members seem at least ambivalent and often mildly hostile to the 'much vexed "Rights of Way" question' as J.G. Stott puts it:

> All of us love sport and recreation too well ourselves to wish to spoil it for anyone else, and amongst right-thinking persons there will be a disposition readily to agree with Mr Parker-Smith, that not compulsory legislation, but a generous give-and-take principle on either side, is the best solution of the question. The conditions over nearly the whole of Scotland are at present on this satisfactory footing: during nine months of the year, and these the best for our purpose, climbers are free to go where they will; and proprietors

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[74] G.G.Ramsay. 'The Formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club'. p.81

> and tenants of deer-forests have a reasonable right to expect that during the three sporting months they will not be disturbed.[75]

Ramsay was similarly unimpressed with the motives of the campaigners, maintaining that:

> I and my friends had no desire to see the proposed Club mixed up with any attempt to force rights-of-way. We did not desire the Club to become a stravaging or marauding Club, insisting on going everywhere at every season, with or without leave, and indifferent to the rights and the enjoyments of farmers, proprietors, and sportsmen.

To *stravag*, or *stravaig*, is 'to wander about aimlessly', according to *O.E.D.*, and in this respect seems to be the Gaelic equivalent of rambling, which means to travel or walk 'in a free unrestrained manner and without definite aim or direction' – like a rural *flaneur*. Both are associated with freedom of movement and access, although the first contains a hint of recklessness and illegality (associated by Ramsay with 'marauding') whilst the second, in the nineteenth century at least, suggested a more harmless activity, associated with scientifically-minded excursions or tourism, through its common use in the titles of Victorian natural history writings and travelogues – even though botany, too could be subversive,

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[75] J.G. Stott. 'Note on Access to the Mountains Bill'. *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*. Vol. I (1891). p. 328.

if John Balfour and James Bryce are anything to go by. [76] However, stravaiging also carries with it different cultural connotations from its Lowland cousin, and is in some ways a kind of Scottish aboriginal 'walkabout', 'indicative of the traditional (and Gaelic) custom to wander at will in all seasons on open moorland, and uncultivated land'. [77]

The SMC's wish to avoid political questions of rights of way contrasts with the opinions of The Alpine Club grandee Leslie Stephen, whose evident glee in his deliberate transgression of official boundaries is evident in his essay 'In Praise of Walking':

> When once beyond the 'town,' I looked out for notices that trespassers would be prosecuted. That gave a strong presumption that the trespass must have some attraction. ... To me it was a reminder of the many delicious bits of walking which, even in the neighbourhood of London, await the man who has no superstitious reverence for legal rights. It is indeed surprising how many charming walks can be contrived by a judicious combination of a little trespassing with the rights of way happily preserved over so many commons and footpaths.[78]

The supposed rationalism of the landlord, who has the supremely rational Law on his side, is called into question here, with Stephen's

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[76] Such writings include: Hugh Miller's *Rambles of a Geologist* (1858), James Arthur Lees' 'A Ramble in British Columbia' (1888) and John Hill Burton's 'Hints for the Vacation Ramble', serialised in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1881)

[77] Robert A. Lambert. *Contested Mountains*. p.37

[78] Leslie Stephen. 'In Praise of Walking'. Studies of a Biographer, Vol.3. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1907. p.258

ridicule of the 'superstitious reverence' for such claims. Reflecting on his early experiences of rambling in the countryside near his school, he recalls the pleasure of going 'out of bounds' as particularly important in the formation of his character, with the freedom of choice over his route, combined with his enjoyment of the natural world around him, allowing for his development as 'an individual being, not a mere automaton set in movement by pedagogic machinery.'[79] Constraints of access, perhaps, may also constrain the autonomy and independence of the individual, in a psychological as well as a physical sense. By maintaining Rights of Way, it would seem, society maintains its links with the natural world which, as the Gaelic poets contended, is artificially divided up only according to the concept of mercantile ownership, and which, if the writings of Veitch and others are considered, is necessary to maintain the psychological and spiritual, not to mention the physical, health of the population.

Indeed, jealous landowners had been ridiculed in the popular press, with the Duke of Atholl (whose deer forest J.H. Balfour and his students had invaded) becoming the butt of several jokes, and no small amount of criticism, after having been involved in a scuffle with a couple of stravaging undergraduates, who gave him a black eye for his trouble. *The*

[79] *Ibid.* p.241

Times described him as a 'hot-headed foolish man', stating that it would be a 'public service' to 'bring him...to his senses'.[80] *Punch* satirised the blustering Duke's obstruction of the right of way, along with his romantic pretensions to Celtic identity - positions which are surely the opposite of one another, considering events in the Western Highlands - in some mock-Ossianic verses printed in 1850:

> Lament: for the visual organ of Atholl is darkened. Raise the sound of wail upon a thousand bagpipes! Closed is the eye of him who would close Glen Tilt to the traveller. Ken ye not the Chieff [sic]of Clan Atholl - the tourist-baffling Duke of the impassable glen?[81]

Indeed, undergraduates in the Highlands appear to be peculiarly susceptible to the allure of stravaging across forbidden landscapes. Arthur Hugh Clough's *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich* (1848), described in its sub-title as a 'long-vacation pastoral', celebrates the rehabilitating effects that a holiday to the Highland landscape has on a reading party of Oxford undergraduates, focusing on their friendships, debates, and activities, with special attention to a holiday romance between one of the party and a local Highland 'lassie' whom he later marries. Youthful hijinks and an apparently perpetually embarrassed Tutor combine to present an energetic and surprisingly realistic portrayal of the experiences of the party, which is throughout presented in mock-heroic

[80] Quoted in Robert Aitken. 'Stravagers and Marauders'. Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal. Vol.30 (1972-75). 351-358. p.353
[81] *Ibid.* p.353

classical metre. The young men, 'in the joy of their life and glory of shooting jackets... read and roamed', seeking to escape the constraints of study:

> Weary of reading am I, and weary of walks prescribed us;
> Weary of Ethic and Logic, of Rhetoric yet more weary,
> Eager to range over heather unfettered of gillie and marquis,
> I will away with the rest...[82]

'Prescribed' walking routes serve to constrain youthful independence, the going 'out of bounds' which Stephen so values. Whether the intersection of land politics and nature appreciation are voiced or not, it would seem that pedestrian enjoyment of the outdoors is an activity necessarily positioned against structures of control such as property and empire:

> Walking focuses not on the boundary lines of ownership that break the land into pieces but on the paths that function as a kind of circulatory system connecting the whole organism. Walking is, in this way, the antithesis of owning. It postulates a mobile, empty-handed, shareable experience of the land.[83]

Walking, by this interpretation, encourages a sense of bioregionalism antithetical to activities undertaken on behalf of the establishment:

> A bioregion is a place that has its own distinctive natural economy....Neither ecosystems nor social customs are co-extensive with national boundaries...A map divided according to bioregions will look very different from one bounded according to nation

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[82] Arthur Hugh Clough. *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich.* II. ll.304-307
[83] Rebecca Solnit. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking.* London: Penguin Books, 2000. p.162

> states...A bioregion is a self-sustaining, self-sufficient natural *oikos* for a diverse body of co-habiting species.[84]

Walking perhaps also allows for the interconnection of people and places not normally associated with each other. In *Kidnapped*, for example, the wanderings of David Balfour and Alan Breck Stewart take them across mountain and moorland, island and mainland, highland and lowland, forming a network between localities, as well as a sense of brotherhood between the two characters. Thus a network of bioregional identities, identities which are, as Veitch maintains, 'moulded' by the effect of localised environment, may come to form the basis of national ones, identities only discovered and reconciled by stravaging adventures in the natural landscape. The values of male-male friendships were propagated by the standard format of the nineteenth century adventure novel, but they were being acted out in the real world, in a variety of circumstances both domestic and 'exotic'. Adventures, whether in the name of science or religion, provided experiences which served to bolster a sense of brotherhood and a suggestion of equality, feeding into patriotism but also forming bonds which could be interpreted as anti-establishment and were certainly cosmopolitan for the time, bringing together bourgeois academic and rebelling tenant farmer, imperial missionary and African

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[84] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2001. p.231

slave on a basis nearer to equality than could be permitted in more conventional metropolitan situations.

Indeed, outdoors associations such as the Scottish Mountaineering Club focus on ideas of shared experience and mobile association, activities which are oriented towards physical sensation and emotional inter-connection. Most of the mountaineering associations proposed to foster, through a 'common love' of the landscape, a 'personal friendship and intimacy amongst its members which will be...as fresh and bracing, might we add everlasting, as the hills themselves'.[85] Ramsay himself speaks of his friendship with Veitch as a 'delightful companionship, of heart and brain and body', a physical, emotional and intellectual bond between them mediated by their feelings for nature - sensations which are also present in Clough's *Bothie*.[86] This ethos was enshrined in the formation of the Alpine Club:

> In the accidental intercourse of those who have been engaged in such expeditions, it has been perceived that the community of taste and feeling amongst those who in the life of the high Alps have shared the same enjoyments, the same labours, and the same dangers, constitutes a bond of sympathy stronger than many of those by which men are drawn into associations; and early in the year 1858, it was resolved to give scope for the extension of this mutual feeling... by the formation of the Alpine Club.[87]

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[85] G.G. Ramsay. 'President's Address'. *SMCJ* Vol I. p.1
[86] G.G.Ramsay. 'The Formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club'. p.83
[87] *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*. pp.vii-viii

Associations are perhaps the institutional expression of the community spirit – a spirit which depends on the 'taste and feeling' of its members. Balfour, too, writes of the happy side-effect of his botanising excursions into the Highlands, which:

> combine that healthful and spirit-stirring recreation which tends materially to aid mental efforts. The companionship too of those who are prosecuting with zeal and enthusiasm the same path of science, is not the least delightful feature of such excursions.[88]

The camaraderie to be had from outdoors activities seems to cut across all political and cultural divisions. Such 'spirit-stirring' physical experience is perhaps nowhere so pertinent as in the travels of the missionary, David Livingstone, whose description of his experiences in Africa emphasises a sense of community between himself and his entourage of tribesmen, which nevertheless maintains a sense of cultural hierarchy:

> We have usually the stimulus of remote chances of danger either from beasts or men. Our sympathies are drawn out towards our humble hardy companions by a community of interests, and, it may be, perils, which make us all friends. Nothing but the most pitiable puerility would lead any manly heart to make their inferiority a theme for self-exaltation; however, that is often done, as if with the vague idea that we can, by magnifying their deficiencies, demonstrate our immaculate perfections.[89]

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[88] Quoted in Robert A. Lambert. *Contested Mountains.* p.26
[89] David Livingstone. *The Last Journals.* pp.13-14

John Francis Campbell, whose *My Circular Notes* (1876) formed the record of his year-long globe-trotting adventures from 1874-75, also noted the sense of community to be had in the wilds of nature:

> What a bond of union a pipe of baccy is between people who love roughing it, and are not dyspeptic town tourists fashionably attired, where homespun ought to be worn.[90]

Campbell values plain-speaking and a no-nonsense approach to life. 'Roughing It' was of course the title of Mark Twain's book length homage to the American frontiersman, which also celebrated the peculiar bonds formed in 'the society of men'.[91] A close friend of John Stuart Blackie, Campbell was the son of the Laird of Islay. He looks back to his early life in the Hebrides as the experience which helped to form his adult personality:

> I was raised in the Highlands of Scotland, and as soon as I was out of the hands of nursemaids I was handed over to the care of a piper. His name was the same as mine, John Campbell, and from him I learned a good many useful arts. I learned to be hardy and healthy and I learned Gaelic, I learned to swim and to take care of myself, and to talk to everybody who chose to talk to me. My kilted nurse and I were always walking about in foul weather or fair, and every man, woman and child in the place had something to say to us.[92]

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[90] John Francis Campbell. *My Circular Notes*. Vol. I. London: MacMillan & Co., 1876. p.53
[91] The phrase 'roughing it' is of dubious origin, but probably began in the Romantic period; it is used by Walter Scott and George Gordon Byron.
[92] Quoted in Donald A. MacDonald. 'Campbell and Gaelic Oral Tradition'. *Lamplighter and Storyteller: John Francis Campbell of Islay 1821-1885*. Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1985. p.10

The Gaelic stravaiging tendency was thus imparted to him at an early age, and associated with talking to people in the landscape. Hardiness and an interest in human affairs appear to go hand in hand in Campbell's picture of his idiosyncratic Highland upbringing.

It is clear that mountaineers and other middle-class wanderers were as much concerned with their own circulatory systems as with the potential ecopolitical significance of establishing hiking routes across the Scottish landscape. Mountaineering and hill walking had come to be seen as healthy, manly pursuits which, although they did allow for hilltop musings and marvellings at the wonders of the 'creation', nevertheless were all about physical action, the body moving across the landscape, the sensations and the benefits of exercise - for physical, mental and moral health alike. Blackie's characterisation of the typical Highlander draws on this interest in the healthy body, which was allied in the Victorian mind with the values of British imperialism. The Highlanders, he maintains:

> grown strong by the stimulus of a healthy air and the exercise of a hardy life, presented a type of physical manhood equalled only by Roman senators and Venetian doges in their best days...[93]

[93] John Stuart Blackie. *The Scottish Highlanders and the Land Laws.* p.6

This demonstrates Blackie's attempt to recast Gaelic manhood – and in so doing, the concerns of Gaelic culture – at the centre, rather than at the periphery, of empire. Stressing the physical prowess of the Highlander, particularly in military action, Blackie maintains that this is derived from the traditional 'Celtic' environment:

> As the country in which he dwelt was small, and arable land scanty, the Highlander naturally grew up into the habits of hardihood and healthy energy, with a well-exercised capacity for shifting himself under difficult circumstances. He was a healthy man, a sturdy peasant, a good workman, a natural gymnast, an intrepid fighter, a daring commander, and the best of colonists.[94]

Such an attitude contrasts markedly with the 'Celtic Twilight' view suggested by Matthew Arnold.[95] Indeed, the issue of 'health', and its moral associations, had become a central concern in Victorian culture, as Bruce Haley argues in his study of this theme. The Victorians were not healthy, and it worried them. Waves of epidemics had swept over the country in the middle years of the century, then untreatable and devastating for huge sections of the population. Housing and sanitary conditions were poor, even among the middle classes, and diseases such as tuberculosis were endemic. The proportion of the British population living in urban areas rose from twenty-five per cent at the beginning of

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[94] *Ibid.* p.19
[95] Matthew Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature' (1866)

the century to eighty per cent at the end.[96] The polluted atmosphere of the Victorian industrial city was considered (not unreasonably) as the main culprit. Indeed, the healthy male body was a sort of Victorian imperial fetish, representative of Christian values, hard work and national allegiance. The depressing reality of the unhealthy Victorian was entirely out of kilter with this imperial image the nation wished to project – of manly vitality, strength and industriousness. This, combined with an increasing concern with degeneration (physical, mental and moral) towards the end of the century was a point of considerable tension within the culture.[97] The Victorian establishment, represented by worried articles in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, was aware of 'centres of decay' in nineteenth-century British culture, which were to be found at 'points of social tension' – tensions resulting from social deprivation and poor living conditions amongst the slums of the industrial cities of empire.[98] Gradually, an image of the ideal 'healthy man' emerged, based around rhetoric of nature, work, morality and physical sensation:

> When his blood is in harmony with the ceaseless activities of nature; when his body is warm with the soft kiss of air, his muscles vigorous with hearty toil, his brain fertile in wise and generous thoughts, his heart glowing with generous purposes. When a man

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[96] Bruce Haley. *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978.
[97] For an illuminating consideration of this theme in nineteenth century culture see Daniel Pick. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-1918*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989.
[98] See Daniel Pick. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-1918*.

> lives most out of himself, then does he truly live...The living body should thrill with every thrill of the wide earth, as the aspen leaf trembles in the tremulous air. Its perfectness lies in continual change.[99]

Physicality had positive as well as negative repercussions - one need only think of the decadent 'sensation novels' popular in the last decades of the nineteenth century which derived much of their popularity from their ability to provoke physical sensations for thrill-seeking readers eager for 'Shocks to the Nervous System'.[100] However, this concern for the physical opened up parallel paths to improvement and rehabilitation. The above quotation from *The Cornhill* in the 1860s encapsulates the sort of physical experience which The Scottish Mountaineering Club and others sought to propagate later in the century. It also glances towards the ethic of 'muscular Christianity' of the likes of Charles Kingsley. Health had become a duty to the empire, and was central to the related idea of self-improvement put forward in the Scots-born Samuel Smiles's treatises, such as the pivotal *Self-Help* (1859). Smiles's writings had titles which became the buzz-words of Victorian culture, with *Character* appearing in 1871, followed by *Thrift* (1875), *Duty* (1880) and *Life and Labour* (1887). These volumes and his other works, were essentially secular, working- and middle-class histories, which focused on the active lives of everyday

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[99] Cited in Bruce Haley. *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978. pp.20-21.

[100] See Lyn Pykett. *The Sensation Novel: from 'The Woman in White' to 'The Moonstone'*. Northcote House in association with The British Council: Plymouth, 1994.

people, rather than the grand gestures of monarchs and wars detailed in more conventional histories. Included with these were biographies of men and women whom he felt exemplified the qualities he was extolling. Perhaps no single Victorian figure summed up the physical and moral potentialities of empire better than the Scots-born missionary and explorer, David Livingstone.

Livingstone's life's work was indeed all about ceaseless duty, industriousness and activity, and his travels strengthened his sense of self-reliance and autonomy – of both mind and body:

> The effect of travel on a man whose heart is in the right place is that the mind is made more self-reliant: it becomes more confident of its own resources – there is greater presence of mind. The body is soon well-knit; the muscles of the limbs grow as hard as a board, and seem to have no fat; the countenance is bronzed, and there is no dyspepsia. Africa is a most wonderful country for an appetite, and it is only when one gloats over marrow bones or elephant's feet that indigestion is possible. No doubt much toil is involved, and fatigue of which travellers in the more temperant climes can form but a faint conception; but the sweat of one's brow is no longer a curse when one works for God: it proves a tonic to the system, and is actually a blessing. No one can truly appreciate the charm of repose unless he has undergone severe exertion.[101]

Stevenson noted the interconnection between health and morality, mediated by man's experience of the natural world, in an essay entitled 'Forest Notes': 'it is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a

[101] David Livingstone. *The Last Journals of David Livingstone 1856 until his death.* p.14

claim on men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of the air, that emanation from the old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit'.[102] If this is Romanticism, then it is a very strange manifestation, a romance of the body rather than the mind. But of course the Romanticism of Wordsworth and his contemporaries did entertain a certain fascination and delight with the physical properties of the natural world, although this ultimately tended to act as a conduit for the experience of the more divine properties mediated by nature, a way of 'seeing into the life of things'. What begins to emerge in the later portion of the nineteenth century, however, is a burgeoning interest in the purely physical experience of the natural world in and for itself, with less and less reference to the spiritual aspect. Leslie Stephen writes that his interest in mountain landscapes was first piqued by reading John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-60). However, Ruskin's aesthetic view of the natural world was somewhat rarefied, removed from experience and antithetical to much of what the Alpine Club and its ilk came to stand for: 'All the best views of hills are at the bottom of them' he was heard to remark.[103] Stephen rejects the truthfulness or the desirability of this approach, arguing that many 'nature lovers':

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[102] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Forest Notes'. *Essays of Travel.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1916. pp.158-159

[103] Fergus Fleming. *Killing Dragons: the Conquest of the Alps.* London: Granta Books, 2001. p.142

> have inclined to ignore the true source of their impulses. Even when they speak of the beauties of nature, they would give us to understand that they might have been disembodied spirits, taking aerial flights among mountain solitudes, and independent of the physical machinery of legs and stomachs.[104]

'Legs and stomachs' contrast markedly with 'disembodied spirits', and make the musings of aesthetes such as Ruskin seem vaguely ridiculous in the face of the matter-of-fact business of life. Similarly, Stevenson revels in the physical rehabilitative effects of nature, which is almost a form of decadence:

> The air penetrates through your clothes, and nestles to your living body. You love exercise and slumber, long fasting and full meals. You forget all your scruples and live a while in peace and freedom, and for the moment only. ...Your ideal is not perhaps high, but it is plain and possible. You become enamoured of a life of change and movement and the open air, where the muscles shall be more exercised than the affections.[105]

This concern for the 'open air' is perhaps not entirely surprising in Stevenson, a life-long sufferer of what was thought to be tuberculosis, a sickly youth who had been a sicker child, whose dreams of the world beyond the sickroom are explored in *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885).[106] It is this love of the open air which is most fully expressed in *Kidnapped*, and which he writes of approvingly in *A Gossip on Romance* as the

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[104] Leslie Stephen. 'In Praise of Walking'. *Studies of a Biographer, Vol IV*. p.250

[105] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Forest Notes'. pp.159-160.

[106] Stevenson's ill health is now thought to be the result of the respiratory condition, bronchiectasis, rather than tuberculosis. See Richard Woodhead. *The Strange Case of R.L. Stevenson*. Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2001.

'problems of the body and the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure'.[107] Indeed, Stevenson provides a very real sense of such practicalities in *Kidnapped*, where hardships and physical strains form the essence of the adventure. David Balfour and Alan Breck Stewart's 'roughing it' in the wilds of the Scottish landscape seems all very vital and energetic, particularly when compared with the conduct of Scott's youthful Romantic hero, Edward Waverley, who seems to spend most of his time in the Highlands either admiring the prospect or being carried over the rough ground by sturdy 'natives'. Although Balfour also suffers illness and fatigue in the Highlands, he is nevertheless 'fit' in a way which the Romantic spectator, Waverley, could never hope to be.

'There has come a change in medical opinion,' Stevenson wrote in his essay, 'Health and Mountains', 'and a change has followed in the lives of sick folk.'[108] The possibilities of the curative properties of a fresh atmosphere had come to the fore in the medical (and later, the public) imagination in the years following Stevenson's birth. The first European sanatoria for the treatment of tuberculosis were founded in the Alps in the 1850s, and the first American sanatorium was founded on Saranac River, New York in 1882 – Stevenson stayed at both of these locations as

[107] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'A Gossip on Romance'. *Memories and Portraits*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1917. p.153

[108] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Health and Moutains'. *Essays of Travel*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1916. p.197.

part of his treatment. His frustration with the life of the invalid, who is constrained by his ill health to be 'idle among spiritless idlers; not perhaps dying, yet hardly living either' is based on the definition of the healthy man current in this culture of health and usefulness.[109] He criticises the languid atmosphere of the southern health resorts which invalids had previously been ordered to:

> There was a lack of a manly element; the air was not reactive...you did not feel that here was a good spot to repair your tissue or regain your nerve.[110]

One doesn't tend to think of Stevenson as a mountaineer, but he had travelled extensively in mountainous areas in search of better health, even living on top of one - Mount Helena in California - for a while, which was recorded in *The Silverado Squatters*:

> A rough smack of resin was in the air, and a crystal mountain purity. It came pouring over these green slopes by the oceanful. The woods sang aloud, and gave largely of their healthful breath. Gladness seemed to inhabit these upper zones, and we had left indifference behind us in the valley... There are days in a life when thus to climb out of the lowlands seems like scaling heaven.[111]

Stevenson corresponded with Leslie Stephen, who had also suffered from lingering ill health as a child; it was Stephen who first encouraged Stevenson to write for *The Cornhill Magazine*, Stephen who introduced

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[109] *Ibid.* p.197
[110] *Ibid.* p.197
[111] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* Vol II. London: Chatto & Windus. p.206

Stevenson to W.E. Henley, incapacitated by an amputation and languishing in an Edinburgh hospital - a meeting which was to lead to a life-long, if not always harmonious, friendship and creative partnership. This sort of networking is perhaps typical of the period - 'these are the days of combinations and associations', as Ramsay says - but it is interesting to note how many of these meetings of minds take place around nodes of health, writing, and the natural world. [112]

Adventure writing and the life of the pioneer are associated at this period with this ethic of health and the outdoors, with rhetorical tropes emphasising the 'healthy' aspect of literature. Andrew Lang notes with approval the burgeoning trend for adventure literature in British culture:

> There has, indeed, arisen a taste for exotic literature: people have become alive to the strangeness and fascination of the world beyond the bounds of Europe and the United States. But that is only because men of imagination and literary skill have been the new conquerors ... have gone out of the streets of the over-populated lands into the open air; have sailed and ridden, walked and hunted; have escaped from the fog and smoke of towns. New strength has come from fresher air into their brains and blood, hence the novelty and buoyancy of the stories which they tell.[113]

Brains and blood and fresh air are the key concerns of these adventure tales, representatives of the Empire itself - and part of the same impulse

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[112] G.G. Ramsay. 'President's Address'. p.3

[113] Cited in Andrea White. *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: constructing and deconstructing the imperial subject.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. p.8.

which moves Mark Twain to glorify the 'stalwart, muscular, dauntless' young men of California in *Roughing It* (1872).[114] Indeed, mountaineering has been read as the physical embodiment of the adventure novel, with the 'British conquest of the natural world ...[symbolising] British imperial domination of other territory during the nineteenth century'.[115] This rhetoric of the outdoors was also employed by Veitch in his study of Scottish poetry, to commend the 'simple' and 'direct' nature feelings of boyhood and naïve poetry which, he contends, is:

> a form of poetry with which we can at no time dispense, if we are to keep our literature healthy; and it is especially needed in these times. For we have abounding morbid introspection and self-analysis; we have greatly too much of the close hot atmosphere of our own fancies and feelings. We depend for our interest in literature too much on the trick of incident or story, too little on character which embodies primary human emotion. We need, as people did at the commencement of the century, some reminder of the grandeur of a simple life, of the instinctive character of high motives and noble deeds, of the self-satisfying sense of duty done; and the close work-shops of our literary manufactures would be all the better for a good fresh breeze from the hills and the holms of the Teviot and the Yarrow.[116]

This yearning for 'the grandeur of a simple life' with its fresh air ethic is notably similar to Stevenson's own yearnings for the vigorous life of the frontiersman amongst the mountains of Colorado:

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[114] Mark Twain. *Roughing It*. Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1872. p.415

[115] Peter H. Nansen. 'Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain'. p.323.

[116] John Veitch. *History and Poetry of the Scottish Border*. pp.555-556

> Any one who has travelled westward by the great transcontinental railroad of America must remember the joy with which he perceived, after the tedious prairies of Nebraska and across the vast and dismal moorlands of Wyoming, a few snowy mountain summits along the southern sky. It is among these mountains in the new State of Colorado that the sick man may find, not merely an alleviation of his ailments, but the possibility of an active life and an honest livelihood. There, no longer as a lounger in a plaid, but as a working farmer, sweating at his work, he may prolong and begin anew his life. Instead of the bath-chair, the spade; instead of the regulated walk, rough journeys in the forest, and the pure, rare air of the open mountains for the miasma of the sick-room – these are the changes offered him, with what promise of pleasure and of self-respect, with what a revolution in all his hopes and terrors, none but an invalid can know. Resignation, the cowardice that apes a kind of courage and that lives in the very air of health resorts, is cast aside at a breath of such a prospect. The man can open the door; he can be up and doing; he can be a kind of man after all and not merely an invalid.[117]

For Stevenson, health and nature are bound up with a love for adventure – a love which he returns to almost obsessively in his writings, and which is itself in many ways the product of the sickroom. The feeling for nature which Stevenson is concerned with is not so much the abstract experience gained by a contemplation of scenery, as the delight in the moving body, a direct and youthful relationship with the natural world typified by the stravaging, Mountaineering tradition - a tradition which manifests itself in the figure of the 'rural *flaneur*'. Physicality thus comes to be privileged over Romantic spectatorship, signalling a march away from Romantic

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[117] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Health and Mountains'. *Essays of Travel.* p.198

aesthetics into the different sort of nature feeling suggested by a culture of adventure, health and physical needs. Writing itself can give the reader a sense of physical participation, and so seems itself health-giving. Stevenson's 'grateful mountain feeling' is ultimately not only of the mind, but more fundamentally, of the body.

Chapter 2:
Rural Flâneurs

> The natural-supernatural...presents itself in the forest; in the animal kingdom, and by the surging sea; in any of those places the physiognomy of a big city can flash for a few moments.[1]

> The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is a joy to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.[2]

> I saw rain falling and the rainbow drawn
> On Lammermuir. Hearkening I heard again
> In my precipitous city beaten bells
> Winnow the keen sea wind. And here afar,
> Intent on my own race and place, I wrote.[3]

'Place' is an ambiguous location; it signifies the wayside or destination as much as it does a homeland, and time or history as much as space or landscape. Robert Louis Stevenson's dedication to *Weir of Hermiston* pictures him writing in one place and imagining another, with the tropical humidity of Samoa replaced for a while in his head by the 'keen sea wind' of Edinburgh and its surroundings. Thinking of home may seem a natural occupation for an émigré, and indeed Stevenson's status

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[1] Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in an Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London : Verso Editions, 1983. p.61
[2] John Muir. 'Our National Parks'. *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books*. Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995. p.459
[3] Robert Louis Stevenson. *Weir of Hermiston*. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995. p.ii

as an 'exile' is perhaps his most defining characteristic. His equivocal relationship with his native land certainly seemed best demonstrated when he was furthest away from it, his international travels radiating out from Scotland, the epicentre of his imagination, his 'race and place'. The 'blessed, beastly place' continued its hold on his imagination in those last years spent in the South Seas; memories arose unbidden, images and sensations linked to the places he knew as a boy.[4] Stevenson's generation was one of the first to experience an unprecedented acceleration of 'progress'; the modernity which accompanied developments in technology, urbanisation, and international travel, but which paradoxically brought individuals into contact with exotic locales, even wilderness areas. Perhaps even more important for Stevenson, such opportunities also brought long-term exile from his homeland. Jonathan Bate remarks that the basis for human connection with the earth is ultimately rooted in 'local knowledge', Thomas Hardy's term, which signifies the understanding of a locality and one's own position in it; a sense of 'old association – an almost exhaustive biographical or historical acquaintance with every object, animate and inanimate, within the

[4] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Letter 2577 to Sidney Colvin' (Vailima, Sat 27th May 1893) *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Vol. 8, Jan 1893 - Dec 1894. Ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew. 8 vols. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995. pp.87-94; p.91

observer's horizon.'[5] Memory and personal connection with the landscape appear to be at the core of true inhabitation:

> To become 'dwellers in the land'... to come to know the earth, fully and honestly, the crucial and perhaps only and all-encompassing task is to understand the place, the immediate, specific place, where we live... We must somehow live as close to it as possible, be in touch with its particular soils, its waters, its winds; we must learn its ways, its capacities, its limits; we must make its rhythms our patterns, its laws our guide, its fruit our bounty. That, in essence, is bioregionalism.[6]

Coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1869 to denote 'all the various relations of animals and plants to one another and to the outer world' (its Greek components literally mean 'house study'), the word 'ecology' was not yet in common currency in Stevenson's time, but its theoretical propositions of interconnectivity and interdependence, not to mention its basis in evolutionary theory, would not be entirely alien to nineteenth-century culture. [7] Bate's extended study of the application of ecological thought to literature, *The Song of the Earth*, theorises the significance of 'ecopoetics', which asks 'in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place'. [8] Considering the vast numbers of his Scottish contemporaries emigrating to North American and other global destinations during this period, as well as the significance of the

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[5] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2001 p.18
[6] Jonathan Bate. 'Poetry and Biodiversity', p.57.
[7] *OED*
[8] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. p.75

wilderness to North American culture and environmentalism, it is interesting to consider Stevenson's own writings on American landscape and culture in the context of questions about 'dwelling' and travel.

Stevenson once remarked that 'I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly'.[9] Stevenson admired William Hazlitt, and this remark is based on Hazlitt's essay, 'On Going a Journey', in which Hazlitt asserts that the 'soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel and do just as one pleases'.[10] Certainly, this dual search for reality and romance can take its place among the other schisms in Stevenson's psychological profile. But this impulse to travel appears to privilege the journey over the destination, not quite the same sense of home and travel which Bate theorises. A sense of place or of home, the possession of 'local knowledge', is surely central to the work of any writer. However, in Stevenson the question of living and locality appears particularly important, given his life of change and travel commingled with the desire to find a suitable destination. Ecological sensibility emphasizes connection and community, and above all a sense of place. But how far does a locality extend? To the bottom of the garden? A

[9] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes'. *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vol. I. Chatto & Windus: London, 1911. p.179
[10] William Hazlitt. 'On Going A Journey'. *The Lore of the Wanderer: An Open-Air Anthology*. Ed. George Goodchild. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1914. p.49

county, country or continent? Stevenson's life and imagination moved between all of these. So, while it is arguably reasonable to place Wordsworth in his Lake District, Heidegger in his Bavarian forest, and Thoreau in his hut at Walden Pond, Stevenson is a different matter. A Scottish writer by birth, certainly; his self-caricature addressed to J.M. Barrie owns up to his habit of 'Given to explaining the universe. Scotch, sir, Scotch.', and his writing demonstrates a lasting albeit equivocal relationship with his homeland, revisiting Scottish scenes in his imagination even while his globetrotting life was leading him to the South Seas.[11] It is, though, difficult to pin Stevenson down to a defining locale. His life and his writing were characterised above all by change and travel, a curious mix of nearby places and far-off destinations, of alternating sick-room confinements and health-seeking holidays. His travelling brought him new homes; temporary residences at Davos in the Alps and Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks, the abandoned miner's cabin in California, the wished-for houses in the south of France, and ultimately Vailima and his 'martins nest' study in Samoa. However, as Stevenson himself acknowledges, travelling is a mental, as well as a physical process, and he suggests that in many ways it is a characteristic of the

[11] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Letter 2550 To J.M. Barrie.' Vol. 8. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew. 8 vols. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995. pp.44-48; p.44

writer or poet himself, who 'must study his fellow-countrymen and himself somewhat like a traveller on the hunt for his book of travels'.[12]

Stevenson read widely, and among his catalogue of early influences, he lists Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, devoting separate essays to each writer in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*.[13] Stevenson's essays make it possible to read these Americans as it were 'over his shoulder', and they reveal his burgeoning interest in the culture and landscape of the United States, before he had the opportunity to experience the country and its landscape at first hand. Thoreau, whose *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, explored the aesthetics and economies of a life lived close to nature, has since been hailed as one of the founding fathers of modern environmentalism, and much has been written on his ecological and political significance in modern thought from his day onwards.[14] Both writers are in many ways representative of the strongly-felt potentialities of nineteenth-century America, their works linking together ideals of democracy, liberty and landscape. Thoreau's *Walden* is both a partial biography and a write-up of his extended experiment in natural living - a

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[12] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Walt Whitman'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. pp.63-88; p.69.
[13] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Henry David Thoreau'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. pp.89-117.
[14] See Gretchen Legler. 'Body politics in American nature writing: "Who may contest for what the body of nature will be?"' Richard Kerridge & Neil Sammells (Eds.) *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism & Literature*. Zed Books: London, 1998.

life somewhat self-consciously stripped of possessions and complexities, focused on the day-to-day experience of a particular place, a local environment. Thoreau explained that he 'went to the woods because ...[he] wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life' – an objective which emphasises simplicity, certainly, but also ideals of personal and political independence – the sort of political and societal ideals which led him to publish *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* in 1849.[15] He chose to live on the edge of society, sustaining himself on home-grown crops, living in a shelter of his own making. His is a peculiar example of 'domestic individualism', an experiment in practical living which parallels other North American experiments of the time.[16] From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a number of experimental 'utopian' communities sprang up, allied with the transcendentalist movement and putting the theory of 'Communitarian Socialism' into practice. Robert Owen, George Ripley, Bronson Alcott and others began their ideal communities, which attracted devotees from the Old world as well as the New. Indeed, one of Walt Whitman's friends, the Scottish photographer Alexander Gardner, emigrated to the States with the purpose of joining one of these utopias in mind (although he joined a photography company instead and was later to be instrumental in cataloguing the landscape of

[15] Henry David Thoreau *Walden or, Life in the Woods and 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience'*. New York and London: The New American Library, 1960. p. 66
[16] Gillian Brown. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth Century America.* Berkely & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992. p.105

the railroad and the West, not to mention the stark experience of the Civil War). Thoreau's solitary existence in the woods was his own version of this movement for political and social independence. Setting up house in this manner would seem to be the ideal of the 'dwelling' perspective, which emphasizes the organic connection between the individual and the patch of earth he or she inhabits, with this natural link being in some way expressed in the construction of the house itself:

> There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing... Shall we forever resign the pleasure of construction to the carpenter? What does architecture amount to in the experience of the mass of men? I never in all my walks came across a man engaged in so simple and natural an occupation as building his house.[17]

The house in many ways grows out of the landscape, is suggested by the landscape, is called into being by the man's organic connection with his chosen place - all very much the sort of thing Heidegger had in mind when he wrote 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking'.[18] Thoreau, who remarked that the only previous habitations he had owned were a boat and a tent, wrote of houses as the 'shells' of their inhabitants, and felt his own shelter

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[17] Thoreau, *Walden*. p.36

[18] Martin Heidegger. 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971.

to be 'a sort of crystallization around me'.[19] Contrasting the artifice of planned architecture with the spontaneous growth of home-building, he develops his theory:

> What of architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller, who is the only builder, - out of some unconscious truthfulness, and nobleness...[20]

Stevenson, too, wrote about the organic links between the landscape and human building, perhaps not so surprising when one considers his heritage of lighthouse engineering, which mediates the relationship between man and the elements in an equivocal way, being both a dwelling place and a manufactured warning. In his essay on 'Roads', he writes about the 'natural growth' of roads and paths in contrast to the deliberately planned and engineered highway – perhaps an unconscious echoing of his sense of contrast in the structure of Edinburgh, with its organic jumble of mediaeval roads in the Old Town and its carefully planned Enlightenment streets in the New.

> We might reflect that the present road had been developed out of a tract spontaneously followed by generations of primitive wayfarers; and might see in its expression a testimony that those generations had been affected at the same ground, one after another, in the same manner as we are affected to-day.[21]

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[19] *Ibid.* p.62
[20] *Ibid.* pp.36-7
[21] Robert Louis Stevenson 'Roads.' *Essays of Travel.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1916. p. 216

The inevitable and organic connection between place and human perception and behaviour is a striking idea, perhaps all the more interesting because here it is applied to a place of travel, rather than of habitation. The road is as much a revelation as a representation of the relationship between man and environment, a way of reading the landscape. Thoreau's practical sort of poetics perhaps seemed refreshing to Stevenson, who was attracted first by the romantic and then the physical possibilities of outdoor life in the New World, and indeed experienced these at first hand in his own makeshift shelter in California. Thoreau's earnestness was, in Stevenson's eyes, admirable although somewhat painful, giving the sense of a writer straining to connect the practical and romantic sides of his nature. Stevenson appears skeptical of Thoreau's transcendentalist leanings:

> The seeming significance of nature's appearances, their unchanging strangeness to the senses, and the thrilling response which they waken in the mind of man, continued to surprise and stimulate his spirits. It appeared to him, I think, that if we could only write near enough to the facts, and yet with no pedestrian calm, but ardently, we might transfer the glamour of reality direct upon our pages, and that, if it were once thus captured and expressed, a new and instructive relation might appear between men's thoughts and the phenomena of nature. [22]

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[22] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Henry David Thoreau'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. p.105

Stevenson's writings about roads and travelling do not consciously set out to analyse this complex relationship, but it is clear that he remains unconvinced by Thoreau's attempts to explore the same. The idea of 'living deliberately', though, strikes a chord with Stevenson, who is much concerned with the troubling questions of human worth and happiness. In *The Silverado Squatters*, he contrasts two different methods of rural living which he encounters during his residence on the mountain:

> the hunter living really in nature; the clodhopper living merely out of society; the one bent up in every corporeal agent to capacity in one pursuit, doing at least one thing keenly and thoughtfully, and thoroughly alive to all that touches it; the other in the inert and bestial state, walking in a faint dream, and taking so dim an impression of the myriad sides of life that he is truly conscious of nothing but himself.[23]

This distinction is significant, and appears to draw upon his reading of both the prose writings of Thoreau and the poetry of Walt Whitman. Stevenson's study of Walt Whitman remarks upon his attempts to 'shake people out of their indifference, and force them to make some election in this world, instead of sliding dully forward in a dream'.[24] Similarly, Stevenson remarks of Thoreau (even while criticising the severity of his denial of the customs of civilisation) that he was 'alive...in every fibre' and speaks with a certain admiration for the man who preferred 'an easy,

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[23] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Vol 2. Swanston Edition. 25 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus. 1911. p.238

[24] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Walt Whitman'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. p.66

calm, unfettered, active life among green trees to dull toiling at the counter of a bank'.[25] Both writers seek to encourage humanity to escape from the 'faint dream' which is the lot of many, to embrace a 'thoroughly alive' existence, to be in touch with the vein of 'woodland poetry' which is perhaps accessible to man, if only he were to look for it.[26] However, Stevenson is wary of what he perceives as the 'cold, distant personality' of Thoreau, whose position as societal outsider affords him the status of an observer, rather than an active participant in human life. Stevenson is more interested in 'a man rather than a manner of elm-tree' and as such is closer to Whitman's absorption in the life of the people. Comparing the two, Stevenson argues that Thoreau's self-improving is merely theoretical, and focused inwards on the self, thus becoming 'arid, abstract, and claustral', whilst Whitman's interpretation of the 'same doctrine' appears 'buxom, blythe and debonair' – and is so precisely because it includes others in its self-celebration.[27]

One senses that what appealed most to Stevenson about Whitman, as it did to his other admirers, was that startlingly frank approach to life. 'Voluptuous, inhabitive, combative, conscientious, alimentive, intuitive, of copious friendship, sublimity, firmness, self-esteem, comparison,

[25] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Henry David Thoreau: Character and Opinions'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. p.96
[26] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. p.238
[27] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Henry David Thoreau'. *Familiar Studies*, p.115.

individuality, form, locality, eventuality': Whitman chants the list of his attitudes and attributes, revealing the fullness of his 'luscious', multitudinous character.[28] The poet's self-portrait in *Leaves of Grass* reveals himself as 'Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, | Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding, | No sentimentalist'.[29] The sensuality and directness of Whitman's poetry are all the more remarkable since that poetry was produced in an age where Victorian tender sentiment and delicate sensibility were sanitising the human experience in its poetic representations. It is not for nothing that Whitman contrasts himself, as self-proclaimed poetic voice (or 'Barbaric yawp') of America, with Britain's contemporary poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson.[30] It is difficult to imagine a greater gulf than the stylistic, moral, and cultural disparity which existed between these contemporaries. The impressions of wilting youth and fashionable melancholia given by Tennyson's polished verses, accomplished as they may be, was of course all grist to Whitman's rough-hewn American mill. Whitman admits in an essay on Tennyson that he admires the English

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[28] Walt Whitman. 'Song of the Broad-Axe'. *Leaves of Grass*. Ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973. pp.184-195.
[29] Walt Whitman. 'Song of Myself'. *Leaves of Grass*. Ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973. pp.28-89; p.52
[30] Walt Whitman. 'Anonymous Self-Review'. Milton Hindu (Ed.) *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. p.43

poet, but does not share his point of view or aesthetics.[31] Stevenson picked up on this stance towards Old World writers, quoting Whitman's wish for American and democratic 'hymns of the praise of things...a brave delight fit for freedom's athletes' in contrast to the English 'literature of woe'. The notion of Old World artifice and dissipation was the favoured conceit of American cultural propagandists such as Whitman, who were seeking to forge a new art which was to reinforce culturally America's political independence from Europe – and to engage in a little cheerful iconoclasm along the way. This new method of representation must reflect a new aesthetic of 'roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance'.[32] The experience of the 'common people' is paramount, and within this diversity Whitman detects vast scores of 'unrhymed poetry' which 'awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it'. Stevenson was sensitive to, and attracted by, the epic scale of this American poetic impulse, recognising in Whitman the desire both to theorise and to facilitate the emergence of a specifically American voice, celebrating diversity whilst emphasising unity. As such, democracy and human interrelationship form the core of Whitman's poetic vision – and these are certainly important values for Stevenson's own work and travels. Such observational wanderings,

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[31] See Walt Whitman, 'A Word about Tennyson'. *Prose Works 1892. Collect and Other Prose.* Vol. II. Ed. Floyd Stovall. 2 vols. New York: New York University Press, 1964. pp.568-572; p.568

[32] Walt Whitman. 'Preface 1855 - *Leaves of Grass*, First Edition'. *Leaves of Grass* p.711

though, are related to a co-emergent poetic practice which he helped to influence and develop: the observational walks and wanderings of the *flâneur*, the figure who, as Walter Benjamin suggests, enjoys 'botanizing on the asphalt'.[33]

The *flâneur*, largely through the work of Benjamin and his landmark study, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in an Era of High Capitalism*, has come to be seen as the quintessential figure of the nineteenth century city. An urban stroller and observer, he remains detached, leisurely, fascinated by the bustle of the crowd and the life of the city streets. By turns a dandy, detective, poet or philosopher, the *flâneur*'s perspective is typically one of urban modernity and bohemian sensibility. In his student days, Stevenson cultivated this sort of persona, as the idling truant who explores the city for purposes of poetic inspiration and private reflection. Valuing the knowledge gleaned through his youthful wanderings, he celebrated his capacity for idleness in 'An Apology for Idlers', where he contrasts the worth of knowledge gained through school room (or lecture room) study and the superior value of 'certain other odds and ends that I came by in the open street while I was playing

[33] Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in an Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Verso Publications, 1983. p.36

truant'.[34] Stevenson took a certain pride in his profligacy, and even flaunted his idleness, to the mixed amusement and chagrin of his fellow-students. It was at this time that he began to experiment with prose poetry and *vers libre*, which enjoyed a limited vogue in European poetry at the time. Baudelaire experimented with the form, most notably in his *Petits poemes en prose* (1869), the result of his admiration of Whitman's poetry, whose lyrical flashes and epic listings are framed in stanzas of sprawling prose.

Stevenson read the work of both Baudelaire and Whitman, and the mixed influence of these are visible in his poetry and essay writing of this period. The poem, 'My brain swims empty and light', shows the student *flâneur* speaking of his city spectatorship as one 'stand[ing] apart from living...In my new-gained growth of idleness'. His detached gaze takes on a secular sacredness. 'Apart and holy', he wanders the streets with an ambiguous purpose.

> I walk the streets smoking my pipe
> And I love the dallying shop-girl
> That leans with rounded stern to look at the fashions,
> And I hate the bustling citizen,
> The eager and hurrying man of affair I hate,
> Because he bears his intolerance writ on his face
> And every movement and word of him tells me how much he hates me.

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[34] Robert Louis Stevenson 'An Apology for Idlers'. *Virinibus Puerisque, and other papers.* London: Chatto & Windus. 1920. pp.71-82; p.73

> I love night in the city,
> The lighted streets and the swinging gait of harlots
> I love cool pale morning,
> In the empty by-streets,
> With only here and there a female figure,
> A slavey with lifted dress and the key in her hand,
> A girl or two at play in a corner of waste-land
> Tumbling and showing their legs and crying out to me loosely.[35]

Perhaps this is not Stevenson's best poetry, but it does give some insights into the theory and practice of his city walking. The poem hints at ideals of acceptance and tolerance, but far more marked is the male voyeuristic glance – the spectacles of the 'shop-girl', the prostitutes and street-girls which people this version of Edinburgh. The poem's emphasis on the spectatorship of female sexuality is a typical stance of the *flâneur*, whose scopophilia objectifies and commodifies the people and the sights of the city – a form of cynical detachment which would seem to be at odds with the ideals of social inclusion which Stevenson finds attractive in Whitman's street walking and way finding. Baudelaire had proposed that:

> For the perfect *flâneur*, ...it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow. . . . To be away from home, yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define...The lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though

[35] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'XXIV. My Brain Swims Empty and Light'. *Collected Poems*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950.

> it were an immense reservoir of electric energy. We might also liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.[36]

Baudelaire's writings suggest that the street is the dwelling place for the crowd and the *flâneur* alike, even while it is simultaneously the site of disorientation and alienation. Surely this sort of social and environmental dislocation is at odds with the very notion of 'dwelling', with the solitary wanderings of the *flâneur* precluding any kind of ecological sensibility. The image of the kaleidoscope is an interesting one, and it was to be used by Whitman and later, by Stevenson, in their portrayal of North American life. Stevenson writes with fascination of the evolving modernity of American culture and landscape in *The Amateur Emigrant*:

> A few wild storybooks which delighted his childhood form the basis of his picture of America. In course of time, there is added to this a great crowd of stimulating details – vast cities that grow up as if by enchantment; the birds, that have gone south in autumn, returning with the spring to find thousands camped upon their marshes, and the lamps burning far and near along populous streets; forests that disappear like snow; countries larger than Britain that are cleared and settled, one man running forth with his household gods before another, while the bear and the Indian are yet scarce aware of their approach; oil that gushes from the earth; gold that is washed or quarried in the brooks or glens of the Sierras; and all that bustle, courage, action, and constant

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[36] Charles Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique*, quoted by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge, Mass. & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002. p.443

> kaleidoscopic change that Walt Whitman has seized and set forth in his vigorous, cheerful, and loquacious verses.[37]

This sense of restless change echoes Whitman's 'Starting from Paumanok', where the reader is invited to 'See, vast trackless spaces | As in a dream they change, they swiftly fill, | Countless masses debouch upon them, | They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts, institutions known'.[38] This celebration of progress is part of Whitman's optimism, but Stevenson's Old World sense of spatial history provokes a certain wistful awareness of the obliterating effects of this 'progress' on the wilderness, even while the possibilities of American pioneering attracts his romantic sensibility. The pace of New World change is here measured by its disruption of the ancient cyclical rhythms of the natural world, with the incongruous coexistence of 'telephones and telegraphs, and newspapers, and advertisements' alongside the 'Indians and the grizzly bears'.[39] Stevenson was certainly fascinated with this juxtaposition of modernity and wilderness in the New World, but he might have been familiar with the concept from his reading of Victor Hugo and others, for whom the Old World city could be expressed in similar terminology as the American forests. Benjamin notes that in some of these novels the 'poetry of terror' of the 'American woods' translated

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[37] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Amateur Emigrant.' *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Vol 2. Swanston Edition. 25 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus. 1911.p.81

[38] Walt Whitman. 'Starting from Paumanok'. *Leaves of Grass.* pp.15-28; p.16

[39] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'.p.181

onto the Parisian streets, creating a genre of fiction in which pedestrians, buildings and coaches are of 'the same burning interest...as a tree stump, a beaver's den, a rock, a buffalo skin' in works such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.[40]

Despite the telegraph poles and newspapers, however, the timeless and trackless nature of the landscape is slowly realised during Stevenson's travels in America. The eagles wheeling in the air around the top of his mountain in *The Silverado Squatters* appear 'solemn and ancient things ... perhaps coeval with the mountain where they haunted, perhaps emigrants from Rome, where glad legions may have shouted to behold them on the morn of battle...'.[41] Stevenson cannot resist the romantic proclivities of his imagination, but this sensation is perhaps more than a mere indulgence of a passing fancy. The birds, perfectly natural in their mountaintop habitat, nevertheless appear to Stevenson as out of place, otherworldly, already historical and almost mythical, when juxtaposed with the determined modernity of American culture. The peculiar honeymoon habitation of the newly-wed Stevensons was in the midst of the strongest evidence of man's intrusion into this sacred place. Their new home at the old silver mine was not quite the picturesque idyll

[40] Quoted by Walter Benjamin in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in an Era of High Capitalism*. p.42
[41] *Ibid.* p.269

'humming with bees and nested in by songbirds' which Stevenson had let himself imagine, and was instead a 'glimpse of devastation', with 'mountain and house and all the old tools of industry... all alike, rusty and down-falling'.[42] Deserted by fortune-seekers, the silver mine was another example of man's intrusion, the results of modern restlessness:

> All things in this new land are moving farther on... This stir of change and these perpetual echoes of the moving footfall, haunt the land. Men move eternally still chasing Fortune; and, fortune found, still wander.[43]

The 'wild storybook' sort of imagination, the 'enchantment' with which the Old World youth gazes at the New, is part of Stevenson's fascination for adventure. But equally the life he encounters at the 'frontier' he believed Mount Helena to represent seems almost unreal, 'a land of stage-drivers and highwaymen; a land, in that sense, like England a hundred years ago.'[44] The combination of romance and reality contributed to an interpretation of place which was ambiguous and fragmented. Stevenson's travels had given him the impression of the kaleidoscope; his longer residence in California perhaps gave him the opportunity to gain some sort of unified experience. His conversations with local residents provided him with local knowledge:

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[42] *Ibid.* p.212
[43] *Ibid* p.192
[44] *Ibid* p.179

> He taught me the madrona, the manzanita, the buckeye, the maple; he showed me the crested mountain quail; he showed me where some young redwoods were already springing heavenwards from the ruins of the old; for in this district all had already perished: redwoods and redskins, the two noblest indigenous living things, alike condemned.[45]

The dual possibilities of fragmentation and diversity, and the fascination with which the *flâneur* or strolling observer views them, are suggested by Stevenson's wanderings. Baudelaire's 'joy' in the 'multiplicity of life' would seem to suggest a quasi-ecological consciousness of human community, and the *flâneur*'s dwelling place within the crowd itself seems to foreshadow ideas about dwelling found in ecological criticism. However, the *flâneur* must remain detached and hidden in order to pursue his spectatorship. Indeed, the typical *flâneur*, as revealed in Baudelaire's poetry and in Benjamin's theory is solitary, detached, male; aristocratic in disposition, his observational wanderings set up a hierarchy of subject and object which denies the possibility of social interaction. The kaleidoscopic properties of the modern city fascinate the *flâneur*, but are abstracted and fragmented, enjoyed for the passing moment, but never allowed to condense into any kind of unity. Hierarchies and fragmentation are not conducive to the acknowledgement of the ecosystem or the bioregion, and emphasise

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[45] *Ibid* p.185

divisions and discontinuities where an ecological way of looking might seek for networks and relationships.

> An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts – until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air.[46]

The 'magnetism' of which Baudelaire speaks is suggestive of a wandering compulsion, something which Stevenson sensed within himself and revisited in his essays and fictions.

> Travel is brought home to us, and we visit in spirit every grove and hamlet that tempts us in the distance. *Sehnsucht* – the passion for what is ever beyond – is livingly expressed in that white riband of possible travel that severs the uneven country...[47]

This idea of *'sehnsucht'* corresponds to what Benjamin calls 'the magnetism of the next streetcorner' experienced by the urban *flâneur*. According to the *OED*, the definition of *sehnsucht* is 'yearning' or 'wistful longing', however, in Arthur Hugh Clough's poem of the same name, it appears to refer to sexual longings and desires in young men and women.

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[46] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*. p.417
[47] Robert Louis Stevenson 'Roads.' p.219

So, whether it signifies lust or wanderlust, *sehnsucht* is a certain instinctive, bodily impulse which propels the individual to seek adventure. In this respect, it provides a unified term for the disparate activities of the *flâneur*, and all his suppressed desire and restlessness.

This very bodily urge for travel and change is expressed in Stevenson's 'Will o' the Mill', where Will's longing for adventure affects him in very physical terms:

> He could see the cities, and the woods and fields, and the bright curves of the river, and far away to where the rim of the plain trenched along the shining heavens. An overmastering emotion seized upon the boy, soul and body... Something kept tugging at his heart strings; the running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface; the wind, as it ran over innumerable tree-tops, hailed him with encouraging words; branches beckoned downward; the open road, as it shouldered round the angles and went turning and vanishing faster and faster down the valley, tortured him with its solicitations.[48]

Will's desires are based on his sense of fragmentation and his wish for sensory unity. Living on the mountainside, he can only piece 'together broken notions of the world below', 'lusting with the eyes' he desires to be a part of the 'many coloured, many-sounding life' which exists below on the plains.

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[48] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Will o' the Mill'. *Tales of Adventure*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1997. pp.13-14

> If he could only go far enough out there, he felt as if his eyesight would be purged and clarified, his hearing would grow more delicate, and his very breath would come and go with luxury. He was transplanted and withering where he was; he lay in a strange country and was sick for home. [49]

This wish for the sharpening of the senses is part of the *flâneur*'s experience. As Edwin Muir suggests, 'the habit of walking the street and looking at the world is still an essential part of Scottish town life' serves to increase 'people's powers of observation, and of resistence to observation'.[50] The *flâneur*'s motivations do seem to share similar psychological traits to the age-old human desire for adventure, 'That divine unrest, that old stinging trouble of humanity.'[51] Stevenson's first-person adventure fictions such as *Treasure Island, Kidnapped* and *Catriona* (although the latter is perhaps more occupied with political maneuverings than the fast-paced practicalities of active adventuring) barely pause to consider the forces which drive the adventures themselves; reader and author are caught up in flurry of action, of happenings, 'the problems of the body and the practical intelligence'.[52] The exteriority of such adventure would later be balanced by the development of a psychological interiority in Stevenson's writings, which

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[49] *Ibid.* p.44
[50] Edwin Muir. *Scottish Journey.* Edinburgh & London: Mainstream Publishing, 1999; 1935. p.15; p.17
[51] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Will o' the Mill'. p.14
[52] Robert Louis Stevenson 'A Gossip on Romance'. *Memories and Portraits.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1917. p.153

serves as a counterpoint to the more traditional elements of romance in *The Master of Ballantrae*. 'Will o' the Mill' is an adventure story characterised precisely by a *lack* of adventure. Here, Stevenson allows himself authorial space to ponder the motivations of explorers, and to evoke the frustrated longings for change and travel which he had himself experienced. Adventure appears not only as a shimmering dream of boyhood but as a central motivating force in the history of mankind. Half-practical, half-spiritual, the adventure impulse is, Stevenson suggests, endemic in human society; it is a 'divine unrest' which characterises mankind itself – 'that old stinging trouble of humanity'. Providing an alternative Enlightenment-style anthropological history of man's epic movements, Stevenson argues for an instinctive sort of romance:

> We are told by men of science that all the ventures of mariners on the sea, all that counter-marching of tribes and races that confounds old history with its dust and rumours, sprang from nothing more than the laws of supply and demand, and a certain natural instinct for cheap rations. To anyone thinking deeply, this will seem a dull and pitiful explanation. The tribes that came swarming out of the North and East, if they were indeed pressed onward from behind by others, were drawn at the same time by the magnetic influence of the South and West. The fame of other lands had reached them ... they were not colonists, but pilgrims; they travelled towards wine and gold and sunshine, but their hearts were set on something higher.[53]

[53] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Will o' the Mill'. p.14

The nobility of adventure goes hand in hand with its more distasteful, practical consequences. However, Will is to reject adventure in this story, by coming to realise that contentment and fulfillment are to be found at his own door and not by adventure for adventure's sake. Adventure, motivated partly by a detached form of romance, is also provoked by desires to do with mastery and possession, a sort of Cartesian imperialism which Bate argues is the underlying basis for much of Western thought's hierarchical view of the relationship between man and nature.[54] The imperial impulse is revealed as pointless to Will; issues of mastery and possession lose their hold on him through a series of self-revelations. His youthful encounter with the 'wise young man' whose parables demonstrate to Will the limitations of the human condition allow him to forego the desire for adventure, whilst his conversation with his fiancée Marjory, who is compelled to pick flowers to satisfy her desire to possess them makes Will realise the pointlessness of marriage as a contract of possession, compared to the free giving of companionship.

There is something of this wish for contented independence and purposeful living in Stevenson's essay on 'Walking Tours':

> We are in such a haste to be doing, to be writing, to be gathering gear, to make our voice audible a moment in the derisive silence of

[54] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth.* pp.99-100; p.244

> eternity, that we forget that one thing, of which these are but the part – namely, to live. ...To sit still and contemplate, – to remember the faces of women without desire, to be pleased by the great deeds of men without envy, to be everything and everywhere in sympathy, and yet content to remain where and what you are – is not this to know both wisdom and virtue, and to dwell with happiness?[55]

But desire for travel is surely central to Stevenson's experience of the world. Flânerie itself involved an odd mixture of domesticity and adventure, in an urban environment which 'splits for him [the *flâneur*] into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room'.[56] Something of this dualistic sense can be gleaned from a passage in 'Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes', a sort of quirky tourist guide to Stevenson's native city of crowded streets and 'draughty parallelograms', in which the night-time appearance of the tenements produces an uneasy sensation of ambiguity in Stevenson's imagination.

> One night I went along the Cowgate after every one was a-bed but the policeman, and stopped by hazard before a tall land. The moon touched upon its chimneys, and shone blankly on the upper windows; there was no light anywhere in the great bulk of building; but as I stood there it seemed to me that I could hear quite a body of quiet sounds from the interior; doubtless there were many clocks ticking, and people snoring on their backs. And thus, as I fancied, the dense life within made itself faintly audible in my ears, family after family contributing its quote to the general

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[55] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Walking Tours'. *Virginibus Puerisque*. London: Chatto & Windus. 1901. pp.259-260.
[56] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*. p.417

> hum, and the whole pile beating in tune to its time-pieces, like a great disordered heart.[57]

The city is 'othered' under his gaze, the tenement buildings both a 'land' (a colloquial Edinburgh expression, but somehow significant in this context) and a collection of rooms, disclosing the life within them but also concealing it. This sensation is perhaps rooted in his troubled childhood experiences of the urban night from his nursery window, and was later to be most fully reflected in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. This dialectic of expanding landscape and confining room finds its parallel in the structure of Stevenson's own life, a perpetual cycle of sickroom confinements and adventurous travel. Something of this duality is reflected in his own family history, as he remarked:

> It were hard to imagine a contrast more sharply defined than that between the lives of the men and women of this family: the one so chambered, so centred in the affections and the sensibilities; the other so active, healthy and expeditious.[58]

The dialectic of the chamber and the expedition is, I would argue, central to Stevenson's experience and, as Benjamin suggests, to the experience of the *flâneur* in general. The *flâneur*'s experience of his environment is one of half-familiarity, half-strangeness, a sort of psychological dislocation

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[57] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes.' *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vol 1. Swanston Edition. 25 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus. 1911.p.283

[58] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'A Family of Engineers'. *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vol 16. Swanston Edition. 25 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus. 1911. p.34

which precludes the sense of the uncanny which was to influence so much of later Modernist thought.

There had been other Scottish *flâneurs*, of course. One need only consider Robert Fergusson, that other Edinburgh lad whose satiric portraits of city life were perhaps among the first products of the 'flâning' tradition. Indeed, Robert Fergusson was in many ways a proto-*flâneur*, in his engagement with the life of Edinburgh, and his observations of the stir and bustle of 'Auld Reekie'. In Stevenson's own time, the Scottish poet James Thomson had written *The City of Dreadful Night*, which transposes the *flâneur*'s actual urban experiences onto a metaphysical landscape, riddled with existential angst which seems to foreshadow the likes of Eliot or Joyce. Thomson's life foreshadows, by the matter of a few years, some of Stevenson's own experiences. While Stevenson was still a student at Edinburgh University, Thomson was Secretary for the Champion Gold and Silver Mining Company, which led him to travel to North America and, in particular, Colorado in 1872. Thomson had been reading Walt Whitman, having been introduced to his work by a correspondence with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who published the first selection of Whitman's poetry in Britain. Thomson was an ardent votary of Whitman, and he contributed an article on him to *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, a monthly periodical devoted to the pleasures of tobacco smoking. Thomson was a regular

contributor to the magazine, with his first musings, 'Stray Whiffs from an Old Smoker' swiftly followed up by a succession of essays which explored themes of smoking, observing and travelling, including Baudelaire's *Les Paradis Artificiels* and the practice of hashish smoking. Thomson's city walking was melancholic and alienating:

> The isolation of thought is sometimes almost appalling. Walking in the streets at night and sunk in musing, I come up to the surface and regard the moving people; and they seem to me distant and apparently unrelated as ships on the horizon traversing the ocean between unknown foreign ports; and there are moments when they seem incalculably and inconceivably remote, as stars and star systems in infinite space.[59]

By contrast, he greatly enjoyed his American trip, and his letters demonstrate a certain restlessness and desire for travel and change:

> When travelling about I always find myself immensely better than when confined to one place. With money, I believe I should never have a home, but be always going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down in it...[60]

This passage sounds very much like something Stevenson would say, and it betrays Thomson's ambiguous attitude towards flânerie.

Certainly, for Stevenson, walking, and rural walks in particular, seem to bring out the best in people. The pleasant sensations at the end of the

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[59] James Thomson. *Poems, Essays and Fragments*. Ed. J.M. Robertson. London, 1905. p.261
[60] Cit. James Thomson. Tom Leonard. *Places of the Mind: The Life and Work of James Thomson ('B.V.')*. London: Cape, 1993. p.173

walker's day bring him into a sense of community with the people he meets. The rural *flâneur* seems to be a cheerful sort of creature, and tobacco seems to be associated with the dual masculine pursuits of 'roughing it' in the rural landscape and flâning in the urban. Indeed, Stevenson's travels in France and North America can be read as a sort of rural flânerie, although he was never quite the 'contemptive' spectator that Benjamin theorises; instead, his irony and objectivity were infused with a good dose of sympathetic humour, and an inclusiveness which was perhaps suggested by his readings of Whitman.

However, Stevenson's observational delight in the world around him is measured with a certain degree of irony, whereas Whitman's celebratory verses offer a distinctly un-ironical perspective; celebratory rather than critical, cheerful rather than playful. Stevenson suggests the value of life depends to a large extent on how prepared one is to be cheerful:

> A feck o' folk frae first to last
> Have through this queer experience passed;
> Twa-three, I ken, just damn an' blast
> The hale transaction;
> But twa-three ithers, east an' wast,
> Fand satisfaction.
>
> Whaur braid the briery muirs expand,
> A waefü' an' a weary land,
> A bumblebees, a gowden band,
> Are blithely hingin';
> An' there the canty wanderer fand

The laverock singin'. [61]

Indeed, Muir's spiritual leanings lead him to suggest 'cheerfulness' as the basis of life itself:

> ...surely all God's people, however serious and savage, great or small, like to play. Whales and elephants, dancing, humming gnats, and invisibly small microbes – all are warm with divine radium and must have lots of fun in them.[62]

This childlike optimism is linked, in Stevenson's imagination, with a delight in adventure and imagination. Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road' is a poem of spectatorship as well as of inclusion. Optimistic, as one might expect, Whitman sets out on his journey 'Afoot and light-hearted... Healthy, free, the world before me', keen to emphasise the democratic possibilities of the road:

> You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,
> I believe that much unseen is also here
> Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial...
> They pass, I also pass, any thing passes, none can be interdicted,
> None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me.[63]

Stevenson liked this poem, and quoted it in his own essay on 'Roads', speaking of the friendliness and cheerfulness of roadside travel, 'the great

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[61] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'VIII The Counterblast - 1866'. *Collected Poems. Collected Poems.* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950.
[62] John Muir. 'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth.' *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books.* Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995 p.81
[63] Walt Whitman. 'Song of the Open Road'. *Leaves of Grass.* pp.149-159; pp.149-150.

network of ways that binds all life together from the hill-farm to the city'.[64] This awareness of roads as the ties that 'bind' together the disparate elements of life is surely one of ecological dimensions, with its emphasis on networks and interrelationships. A similar sense is given by Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the chronotopic significance of the road:

> The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road...the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people - representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages - intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another. On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances. [65]

This idea is vital, if we are to come up with an alternative to the rooted 'dwelling' posited by the likes of Thoreau and Heidegger. Both Stevenson and Whitman seem to skirt around the possibilites of the road-as-chronotope:

> You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!
> I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me...
> From all that has touch'd you I believe you have imparted to yourselves, and would impart the same secretly to me,

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[64] Robert Louis Stevenson 'Roads.' *Essays of Travel*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1916. p. 216.

[65] Mikhail Bakhtin. 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.' *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. p.243

> From the living and the dead you have peopled your impassive surfaces, and the spirits thereof would be evident and amicable with me.[66]

The country road, 'Latent with unseen existences', retains a romantic allure, a sort of magnetism which is similar to the fascination the *flâneur* feels for the city street.

> The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward... into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private... In the asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground.[67]

The public past of the beaten path underlies the pleasure of the *flâneur*'s wanderings. There is, for Stevenson's strolling countryside observer and Benjamin's obsessive city-walker, a sort of romance available in the road beneath one's feet. This doubleness may seem the product of urban modernity, but it is ultimately a form of sensation related to the idea of 'local knowledge', the knowledge of 'those invisible ones of the days gone by' that people the ground. Part of the attraction the *flâneur* feels for the streets is that romantic wondering of what lives intersect chronotopically with his own. The impossibility of attaining that knowledge in an unfamiliar place does not necessarily suggest alienation,

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[66] Walt Whitman. 'Song of the Open Road'. *Leaves of Grass*. p.150
[67] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*. p.416

it can facilitate an imagined community of person, place and memory which is mysterious yet somehow organic. Whitman is convinced that the 'unseen existences' of the road are interconnected with his own existence, the road serving as a chronotopic conduit for his imagination. It is interesting to note that, by contrast, Thoreau entertains a certain revulsion at this idea:

> Alas! how little does the memory of these human inhabitants enhance the beauty of the landscape. ...I am not aware that any man has ever built on the spot which I occupy. Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries. The soil is blanched and accursed there...[68]

Thoreau seems to want to be solitary both temporally and spatially, whereas Whitman and Stevenson find a certain solace in the idea of continuous human habitation. This chronotopic sense is closer to dwelling than one might at first have imagined: we seem to be faced with the unlikely truth that the *flâneur* may be an ecological figure. Indeed, Walter Benjamin suggests that the genesis of the *flâneur* is rooted in the rural rather than the urban, contrasting the 'dandy' with another, more ecological trait:

> Yet also in the *flâneur* a long-extinct creature opens a dreamy eye, casts a look that goes to the heart of the poet. It is the 'son of the wilderness' – the man who, once upon a time, was betrothed, by a generous nature, to leisure. Dandyism is the last glimmer of the

[68] Thoreau. *Walden*. p.177

> heroic in times of decadence. Baudelaire is delighted to find in Chateaubriand a reference to American Indian dandies – testimony to the former golden age of these tribes.[69]

The idea of the *flâneur* as a 'son of the wilderness' or what might be called 'the Idle Savage' certainly appears to be an incongruous one, but it has a surprising resonance of accuracy, given the experience of Whitman, Thomson and Stevenson – linked as it is with a faculty for romance and leisure. Idleness becomes a method for living deliberately – a stance perhaps not so far removed from Thoreau's rejection of the principle of labour – since 'a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity' in contrast to the lives of conventionally industrious men, who appear to Stevenson as:

> a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people ... who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation...They have no curiosity; they cannot give themselves over to random provocations...It is no good speaking to such folk.[70]

Stevenson's attitude to these 'dead-alive' people foreshadows the existentialist's disdain for those who keep 'bad faith', who live an inauthentic, unaware existence. By contrast, the activity of cheerful idleness permits a fuller and truer education, a way of 'living deliberately' which is at the heart of Stevenson's version of 'authenticity':

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[69] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project.* p.806
[70] Robert Louis Stevenson 'An Apology for Idlers'. p.77

> As a matter of fact, an intelligent person, looking out of his eyes and hearkening in his ears, with a smile on his face all the time, will get more true education than many another in a life of heroic vigils. There is certainly some chill and arid knowledge to be found upon the summits of formal and laborious science; but it is all round about you, and for the trouble of looking, that you will acquire the warm and palpitating facts of life.[71]

This takes us back to the root of the problem: is it possible to 'dwell' on the move? To answer this, it may be necessary to look to the history of ecological politics itself, in the observational walks and nature conservation campaigning of the Scots-born founder of the American National Parks system, John Muir. Widely considered to be America's first environmentalist, John Muir's life on the frontier and his wilderness travels are chronicled in his books, and reveal the development of ecological thinking through his own emigrant experiences – a personal evolution perhaps only possible through his own experience of pioneer life. His books are in many ways sprawling travel narratives, encompassing the intricacy of life in the wilderness, and developing an awareness of interconnection between animals, plants, landforms and climate. Of course, they take as their landmarks the networks of plant and animal life Muir encounters on the trail, rather than the human communities which Stevenson is interested in. However, their approaches and experiences bear some comparison, both having

[71] *Ibid.* p.75

'emigrated' (although one of them was only an 'amateur') to the vast landscape of the United States from Scotland and its distinctive environment. John Muir was in many ways a Scots 'lad o' pairts' transplanted to the American landscape, but it was only through the experience of that landscape that he was able to discover his vocation, and only in escaping from the grinding hard labour of his father's farm that he was able to fulfil that potential.

Muir writes in *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth,* his only specifically autobiographical work, that he liked to play truant as a child along the rocky coastline of Dunbar:

> Oh, the blessed enchantment of those Saturday runaways in the prime of the spring! How our young wondering eyes revelled in the sunny, breezy glory of the hills and the sky, every particle of us thrilling and tingling with the bees and glad birds and glad streams! ...we were glorious, we were free - school cares and scoldings, ear thrashings and flesh thrashings alike, were forgotten in the fullness of Nature's glad wildness. These were my first excursions - the beginnings of lifelong wanderings.[72]

Muir's first 'excursions' were focused on self-education, studying the botany and geology of the landscape as he followed his own paths through the wilderness. His early wanderings seemed frivolous and a bit self-indulgent when viewed by the local inhabitants of the places he

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[72] John Muir. 'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth.' *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books.* Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995. p.41

passed through, who were self-confessedly there to 'make a living' and not 'live deliberately'. However idle these early rambles appeared to the casual onlooker, it is certain that they led to later political efforts which were instrumental in setting up the American national parks. Founding the Sierra Club in 1892 was one of the turning points in his efforts to make the wilderness more accessible to the everyday person, and the sepia picture of Muir and Theodore Roosevelt together in the Yosemite at the turn of the century has become an image familiar to every American schoolchild. In the age of the travel book, Muir's works brought the possibility of visiting the wilderness home to the average bourgeois American:

> Muir's writing not only walked readers sensuously and slowly into the wild, but gave them a warm sense of their rightful place there. The wilderness, their wilderness, was not threatening, it did not deserve the ignominy of conquest or exploitation, it was a resource for their self-discovery. Nature, in Muir's writing, assumed the possibility of actually including urbanised 'denatured' readers who lived in cities.[73]

Muir's genius tends towards the descriptive, and in an age where images of the wilderness were not yet widely available (people on the East coast had difficulty believing the tall tales of taller trees, the Giant Redwoods or Sequoia, which came out of the West) his writings about the diversity of

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[73] Terry Gifford. 'Introduction'. *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books*. Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995. p.18

the American landscape helped to bring about the conservation of the wilderness which he so desired. His experiences as a newly-emigrated child and a hard-working young man on his father's farm in Wisconsin gave him a link of sympathy to the experience of the pioneer, and he speaks in remarkable organic imagery of the

> Yankee families from adjacent states, who had come drifting indefinitely westward in covered wagons, seeking their fortunes like winged seeds; all alike striking root and gripping the glacial drift soil as naturally as oak and hickory trees; happy and hopeful, establishing homes...[74]

However, his prose is at times tinged with a little too much purple, and in some places reads like an enthusiastic chorus of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'. His writings are imbued with a very Christian sense of the wonders of creation, even while Muir denies the anthropocentric view of nature which religious dogma sometimes emphasises.

> Let a Christian hunter go to the Lord's woods and kill his well-kept beasts, or wild Indians, and it is well, but let an enterprising specimen of these proper, predestined victims to go to houses and fields and kill the most worthless person of the vertical godlike killers - oh! that is horribly unorthodox, and on the part of the Indians atrocious murder! Well, I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears.[75]

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[74] John Muir. 'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'. *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books.* Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995. p.89

[75] John Muir. 'A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf.' *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books.* Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995. p.89

His charitable attitude towards the hypothetical 'Indians' was not quite so conspicuous during real-life encounters with native peoples. Disrupting his fine sense of romantic individualism, the presence of poverty-stricken and malnourished tribes-people in the privacy of the wilderness is taken almost as a personal affront. This is not so far from Thoreau's wish for woodland solitude, which has been criticised for its intrusion into the landscape of an 'innocent and unpoliticised' body; which serves as a vehicle for the continuance of the traditional Western hierarchical values which privilege the white heterosexual bourgeois male over anything which counts as the 'Other': the 'body', as Thoreau and Muir imagine it, 'is raceless (white), genderless (male), sexless (heterosexual) and classless (middle class)'.[76] Muir, too, de-emphasises the bodily aspect of nature experience, rapturously declaring that 'you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature'.[77] This type of view celebrates God-as-everywhere, a complete contrast with Whitman's standpoint of self-celebration. Muir's standpoint is certainly more traditional, focused on the Christian-Romantic view of boyhood, and the solitary experience of nature – somewhat similar to some of John Veitch's writings, considered in Chapter 1. Muir's travel and nature writings were

[76] Gretchen Legler. 'Body politics in American nature writing: "Who may contest for what the body of nature will be?"' *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism & Literature.* Richard Kerridge & Neil Sammells (Eds.) Zed Books: London, 1998. p.72
[77] John Muir. 'A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf'. p.183

very popular in the United States, however, and in his 'A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf' Muir reasserts the aesthetics of wilderness – an ideology of the untouched, rugged landscape which appealed to both Stevenson and Whitman:

> I reached the green woods and spread out my pocket map to rough-hew a plan for my journey... My plan was simply to push on in a general southward direction by the wildest, leafiest, and least trodden way I could find.[78]

New paths and new routes were necessary; even in that new country, which had been a wilderness for centuries, there were established roads for humans to follow. Muir travelled self-consciously light on his nature walks; his knapsack contained nothing more than 'a comb, brush, towel, soap, a change of under-clothing, a copy of Burns's poems, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and a small New Testament'.[79] Burns, it seems, was an important influence, and there are shades of his 'To a Mouse' sense of universality in most of Muir's work; no doubt the concept of 'nature's social union' appealed to the environmentalist's sense of interconnection and interdependence.[80] Indeed, his recollection of discovering a mouse's nest in *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* is deeply reminiscent of Burns's similar poetic encounter.

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[78] *Ibid.* p.119
[79] *Ibid.* p.124
[80] See Robert Burns. 'To A Mouse'. *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse.* Ed. Robert Crawford & Mick Imlah. London: Allen Lane / The Penguin Press, 2000. p.281.

The parallels between the lives of humans and animals, which Burns highlights with his own form of imaginative sympathy, appeals to Muir, just as Burns's democratic sensibility appealed to Whitman, who remarked that Burns's 'concrete, human points of view' made him 'very close to the earth', producing poetry remarkable for its 'boldness' and 'rawness'.[81] Seeking to dismantle the hierarchical mode of thinking that places 'Lord Man' at the top of the tree, apart from and superior to the natural world, Muir instead posits a network of interdependence in which humans appear as a part of the whole, no less necessary or unnecessary than a bacterium.

> Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit – the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.[82]

This is closer to the inclusiveness celebrated by Whitman, who highlights the interconnection of all things, and hints at the properties of 'lower' life-forms which humans share through their evolutionary heritage:

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[81] Walt Whitman. 'Robert Burns as Poet and Person'. *Prose Works 1892: Collect and Other Prose*. Vol. II. Ed. Floyd Stovall. 2 vols. New York: New York University Press, 1964. pp.558-568.
[82] John Muir. 'A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf'. p.160

> I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
> And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren...
> I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,
> And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over
> And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
> But call any thing back again when I desire it.[83]

Whitman's aesthetic is most assuredly not one of Cartesian dualism, and indeed his efforts on behalf of a democratic art seeks to dismantle such hierarchies, and as such is more in keeping with an ecological vision of the world than is perhaps Muir's own.

> Mastery and possession: these are the master words launched by Descartes at the dawn of the scientific and technological age, when our Western reason went off to conquer the universe. We dominate and appropriate it: such is the shared philosophy underlying industrial enterprise as well as so-called disinterested science, which are indistinguishable in this respect. Cartesian mastery brings science's objective violence into line, making it a well-controlled strategy. Our fundamental relationship with objects comes down to war and property.[84]

The human interest of adventure writing tends to foreground the human figure and diminish the importance of nature – a humanist hierarchy which has prevailed in Western thought since the Renaissance at the very least. Much ecocritical theory values the experience of 'dwelling' in the natural world, in opposition to the tactics modern humans tend to

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[83] Walt Whitman. 'Song of Myself'. ll. 663-673. *Leaves of Grass*. p.59
[84] Jonathan Bate. *Song of the Earth*. p.99

employ in their relationship with nature - those of exploitation and hierarchy; in other words, the tactics of Cartesian imperialism. The replacement of the values of the hierarchy with those of the ecosystem are of particular interest to contemporary analyses of nature writing, and have been adopted and transformed by proponents of ecocritical theory in a number of ways, however, it is by no means clear whether Stevenson's works of fiction, absorbed as they often are in the world of romance and adventure, merely reiterate the conventional dualities of man and nature in their representations of environment, or whether it is possible to detect a renegotiation of landscape, not just as background scenery, but as an interesting and equivocal participant in the world of the novel itself.

Perhaps Stevenson's most profound treatment of this theme is to be found in the novel whose very title speaks of mastery and locality: *The Master of Ballantrae*. Inspired during Stevenson's stay in the Adirondack mountains, and his experiences at sea, it is a strange tale, and one which 'extends over many years and travels into many countries'.[85] The reader thus approaches it with a ready-made sense of alienation, twice-exiled already from the world of the novel, both spatially and temporally

[85] Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Master of Ballantrae*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1995. p.xv

dislocated, as the exile of both author and editor provides a narrative framework for what is to come. The supposed 'editor' of MacKellar's century-old revelations introduces himself as 'an old, consistent exile' whose time spent revisiting his native city, finds it to be 'strange' and 'painful':

> Outside, in foreign spots, he comes by surprise and awakens more attention than he had expected; in his own city, the relation is reversed, and he stands amazed to be so little recollected. Elsewhere he is refreshed to see attractive faces, to remark possible friends; there he scouts the long streets, with a pang at his heart, for the faces and friends that are no more. Elsewhere he is delighted with the presence of what is new, there tormented by the absence of what is old. Elsewhere he is content to be his present self; there he is smitten with an equal regret for what he once was and for what he hoped to be.[86]

The editor had heard something of the history of the Durrisdeers through the whisperings of local knowledge and tradition, and indeed MacKellar's narrative begins with a glance at the countryside reputation of the family – a similar device to that employed in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's opening passages in *A Scots Quair*. Indeed, local knowledge shows itself to be central to the novel's twisting plot; the guides and trackers who know 'the secret paths of the wilderness' and Secundra Dass, whose method of saving the Master fails because his tropical

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[86] *Ibid.* p.xv

knowledge does not apply to the frozen wastes of the winter Adirondacks.

Places and people, in *The Master of Ballantrae*, are riddled with a profound duality, as the experience of the American wilderness seems as alien to the bewildered Chevalier and Master as the night-time city appeared to Stevenson and Thomson in their wanderings. The essential ambiguity of reality is suggested by the Irish Chevalier's account of their first struggles in the wilderness:

> Some parts of the forest were perfectly dense down to the ground...In some the bottom was full of deep swamp, and the whole wood entirely rotten. I have leaped on a great fallen log and sunk to the knees in touchwood; I have sought to stay myself, in falling, against what looked to be a solid trunk, and the whole thing has whiffed at my touch like a sheet of paper.[87]

This doubleness is later echoed in MacKellar's description of his feelings towards The Master once he has resolved to follow the family across the ocean to America:

> The outer sensibility and inner toughness set me against him; it seemed of a piece with that impudent grossness which I knew to underlie the veneer of his fine manners; and sometimes my gorge rose against him as though he were deformed - and sometimes I would draw away as though from something partly spectral. I had moments when I thought of him as of a man of pasteboard - as

[87] *Ibid*, p.52

> though, if one should strike smartly through the buckram of his countenance, there would be found a mere vacuity within.[88]

A clever and at times disturbing analysis of psychological motives, *The Master of Ballantrae* is, above all, an extended study of the duality of dwelling and adventure; of who goes off to seek his fortune and who stays behind at home. It might well be expected that adventure, with all its associations with fortune-seeking, exploration and exploitation, is defined by Cartesian mastery and possession, and that the Master, as his title suggests, engages unashamedly with this self-centred way of life. Indeed, that is the way the character is presented for the first half of the novel; a rapacious, ruthless man who sets his own independence and life above everything else. By this analysis, the brother that stays at home is the less guilty of the two; long-suffering, taking care of his lands and family. But it is difficult to see how the house of Durrisdeer is a dwelling, its bulk and grandeur failing to reflect the schismed family living under its roof. Indeed, the house itself is an 'abstraction', a symbol of unity which masks division and deceit:

> I saw that he had fallen, like the rest of us, to think mainly of the house. Now that all the living members of the family were plunged in irremediable sorrow, it was strange how we turned to that conjoint abstraction of the family itself...[89]

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[88] *Ibid.* p.154
[89] *Ibid.* p.102

The family's emigration to North America is the final judgement on dwelling at Durrisdeer:

> And then they were gone indeed, having looked their last on the kind roof of Durrisdeer, their faces towards a barbarous country. I never knew before the greatness of that vault of the night in which we two poor serving-men....stood for the first time deserted; I had never felt before my own dependency upon the countenance of others. The sense of isolation burned in my bowels like a fire. It seemed that we who remained at home were the true exiles, and that Durrisdeer and Solwayside, and all that made my country native, its air good to me, and its language welcome, had gone forth and was far over the sea with my old masters.[90]

The locality and its associations are disrupted for MacKellar, the unseen existences of the house only provoking melancholia and alienation, the familiar memories stimulating the opposite of the *flâneur*'s cheerful pleasure in the unfamiliar resonances of place. The dwelling, deserted by its inhabitants, is a ghostly, equivocal place, appealing to a certain melancholic romance and nothing more.

> We took our leave in silence: the house of Durrisdeer standing with drooping gutters and windows closed, like a place dedicate to melancholy. I observed the Master kept his head out, looking back on these splashed walls and glimmering roofs, till they were suddenly swallowed in the mist; and I must suppose some natural sadness fell on the man. . .[91]

The ultimate destination or 'home', in *The Master of Ballantrae*, is the wilderness and the only act of 'dwelling' possible in that environment is

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[90] *Ibid.* p.144
[91] *Ibid.* p.151

to die there; all paths lead to the metaphorical fall of the house, and brotherly unity is only possible in the grave. Neither dwelling nor travelling can offer any solace in this novel; human community is again and again denied, and any sense of connection with the natural world is rooted in the past of childhood, not in the tragic business of adult life. The obsession with control, with 'mastery', leads to tragic ends. Henry Durie's plot to kill his brother leads his imagination to wander after him through the Adirondack forests, as MacKellar remarks that his mind:

> dwelled almost wholly in the Wilderness, following that party with whose deeds he had so much concern. He continually conjured up their camps and progresses, the fashion of the country... And it is the less wonder if the scene of his meditations began to draw him bodily.[92]

But this is not to say that emotions of love, admiration and allegiance are impossible. However, these too are interrogated and shown to be of an ambiguous nature. Despite MacKellar's protests, he admires and even respects the wicked Master, and the reader is drawn into this mixture of fascination and revulsion:

> 'Life is a singular thing,' said he, 'and mankind a very singular people. You suppose yourself to love my brother. I assure you, it is merely custom. ...Had you instead fallen in with me, you would to-day be as strong upon my side.'[93]

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[92] *Ibid.* p.191
[93] *Ibid.* p.164

Equivocal allegiances, it might be suggested, are at the core of the exile's experience; allegiances to the place of one's birth and one's adopted home:

> Of all the mysteries of the human heart, this is perhaps the most inscrutable. There is no special loveliness in that grey country, with its rainy, sea-beat archipelago; its fields of dark mountains; its unsightly places black with coal; its treeless, sour, unfriendly-looking corn-lands; its quaint, grey, castled city, where the bells clash of a Sunday, and the wind squalls, and the salt showers fly and beat. I do not even know if I desire to live there; but let me hear, in some far land, a kindred voice sing out, 'Oh, why left I my hame?' and it seems at once as if no beauty under the high heavens, and no society of the wise and good, can repay me for my absence from my country. And though I think I would rather die elsewhere, yet in my heart of hearts I long to be buried among good Scots clods.[94]

Where one will be buried seems to be an important theme; it draws Stevenson to write his famous 'Requiem':

> This be the verse you grave for me
> *Here he lies where he longed to be;*
> *Home is the sailor, home from sea*
> *And the hunter home from the hill.*[95]

But which 'home', which 'here' did he have in mind? The poem was written while he was ill in North America, but it was eventually to be carved on his memorial in Samoa. Of course, part of the poem's meaning follows from the metaphor of life as a journey, and 'home' is death (this

[94] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. pp.194-5.
[95] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'XXI Requiem'. *Collected Poems. Collected Poems.* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950.

was oddly inverted in 'Will o' the Mill', where death itself is the only journey the hero takes). James Thomson seems to be an unlikely kindred spirit in this wistful wondering, writing his own requiem:

> Where shall once the wanderer weary
> Meet his resting-place and shrine?
> Under palm-trees by the Ganges?
> Under lindens of the Rhine?
> . . .
> Ever onward! God's wide heaven
> Must surround me there as here;
> And like death-lamps o'er me swinging
> Night by night the stars burn clear.[96]

Destinations are a hazy mirage to the *flâneur*, whose existence is defined by movement. Is the *flâneur*, then, really the ecological figure which has been stalking the margins of Stevenson's writings? The answer, perhaps, lies in the relationship between 'place' and memory, which began this discussion. Stevenson's memory flashed upon him with sensations of his homeland, as he records in a letter to Sidney Colvin:

> I am exulting to do nothing. It pours with rain from the westward, very unusual kind of weather; I was standing out on the little verandah in front of my room this morning, and there went through me or over me a heave of extraordinary and apparently baseless emotion. I literally staggered. And then the explanation came, and I knew I had found a frame of mind and body that belonged to Scotland, and particularly to the neighbourhood of Callander. Very odd these identities of sensation, and the world of connotations implied; Highland huts, and peat smoke, and the brown swirling rivers, and wet clothes, and whisky, and the

[96] Cit. James Thomson. Tom Leonard. *Places of the Mind: The Life and Work of James Thomson ('B.V.')*. London: Cape, 1993. p.172

> romance of the past, and that indescribable bite of the whole thing at a man's heart...[97]

The romance of memory is a savage sort of thing, not sentiment only, but physical sensation. Stevenson had been reading stories by Barbey d'Aurevilly, the Parisian dandy and journalist, and found in them the 'reek of the soil and the past', 'an identity of sensation; one of those conjunctions in life that had filled ...[him] to the brim, and permanently bent his memory'. Elsewhere he remarks that 'the strangest thing in all man's travelling, [is] that he should carry about with him incongruous memories. There is no foreign land; it is the traveller only that is foreign, and now and again, by a flash of recollection, lights up the contrasts of the earth'.[98] John Muir, too, had this experience during his wanderings:

> ...while I was yet many miles back in the palmy woods, I caught the scent of the salt sea breeze which, although I had so many years lived far from sea breezes, suddenly conjured up Dunbar, its rocky coast, winds and waves; and my whole childhood, that seemed to have utterly vanished in the New World, was now restored amid the Florida woods by that one breath from the sea. Forgotten were the palms and magnolias and the thousand flowers that enclosed me. I could see only dulse and tangle, long-winged gulls, the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth, and the old castle, schools, churches, and long country rambles in search of birds' nests.[99]

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[97] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Letter 2577 To Sidney Colvin'. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew. 8 vols. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995 p.91

[98] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. pp.216-217

[99] John Muir. 'A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf'. p.156

The startling incongruity of these visions, seen as they are in unlikely foreign places, makes them all the more vivid to the beholder. The sensation of the old land is not, perhaps, a measure of the incongruity of the new, but of the similarities between localities, a sense of *déjà vu* which washes over the exile with a sudden rush. Stevenson's sense of romance or historical resonance, rather than alienating him from the places he travels to, allows him to engage with different localities, to tap into local knowledge through imaginative sympathy. Muir finds a unity in his travels which approximates the idea of the bioregion:

> In my walk from Indiana to the Gulf, earth and sky, plants and people, and all things changeable were constantly changing... I noted no difference in the sky, and the winds spoke the same things. I did not feel myself in a strange land.[100]

Strangeness is relative, as is familiarity. The idea of 'dwelling' can thus perhaps be adapted to Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope', the 'organising centre' which binds the impressions of life and fragments of experience together, just as the road represents a network of ways and lives. Change and travel may not lead inevitably to alienation, and the rural *flâneur*, as an incarnation of the heroic idler or in his chronotopic awareness, might be considered as a 'dweller' after all – a possibility which, in twentieth-century Scottish writing, would become even more vital.

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[100] *Ibid.* p.171

Chapter 3:
Local and Global Outlooks

> Mars is braw in crammasy,
> Venus in a green silk goun,
> The auld mune shak's her gowden feathers,
> Their starry talk's a wheen o' blethers,
> Nane for thee a thochtie sparin',
> Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!
> *– But greet, an' in your tears ye'll droun*
> *The haill clanjamfrie!* [1]

> Our earth is but as an atom in space, a star amongst stars. Yet, to us who inhabit it, it is still without bounds. [2]

Hugh MacDiarmid argued in the 1920s that the Scots vocabulary he had discovered by reading Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* constituted a valuable 'unutilized mass of observation' which was a 'vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking'.[3] The crucial features of this vocabulary, for MacDiarmid, were precisely what had consigned it to obscurity: its roots in the Scottish rural environment, and its ability to describe and facilitate the relationships of rural people to that environment. MacDiarmid writes that the observational power

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[1] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn'. *Sangschaw*. (1925); repr. *Complete Poems 1920-1976*. Vol. I. Ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken. London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1978. p.17

[2] Elisée Reclus. *The Earth and Its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography*. Vol I. (19 vols) Ed. E.G. Ravenstein. London: J.S. Virtue & Co Ltd., 1876-1894. p.7

[3] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'A Theory of Scots Letters'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. p.22

implicit in the Scottish vernacular was 'made by minds whose attitudes to experience and whose speculative and imaginative tendencies were quite different from any possible to Englishmen and Anglicized Scots today'.[4] The implication here is that it is possible to get back to the psychological 'roots' of what MacDiarmid views as authentically Scottish communities through linguistic revival. MacDiarmid's early lyrics, such as the beautiful 'The Watergaw', with its use of archaic rural terminology such as 'yow-trummle' or the word 'watergaw' itself, certainly demonstrate the dual potential of such poetic vocabulary for both precise description and enigmatic complexity.[5] The often minutely specific meanings of the Scots words are matched by their difficulty of translation, since some of the vernacular vocabulary employed in the lyrics had evolved to represent a rural environment and a way of life which was, by the time MacDiarmid was writing, largely obsolete, or at least unknown to the urban majority.

By the 1920s, traditional rural communities and industries had been dissolving for some time, largely in response to economic circumstances, combined with the growth of machine-age solutions for agricultural processes, such as tractors and later, combine-harvesters, in place of

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[4] *Ibid.* p.23

[5] MacDiarmid discusses this in 'A Theory of Scots Letters'. *Selected Prose.* Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. pp.16-33; p.24.

ploughing with horses or stooking by hand. By the turn of the twentieth century, out of a population of approximately 4.4 million, 'just under two hundred thousand people [were left] on the farms of Scotland'.[6] While novelists such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Nan Shepherd were to portray these dramatic changes in their regional fiction of the 1930s, MacDiarmid hoped to capitalise on the discrepancy between rural language and urban experience in his own work from the 1920s onwards, as part of a project explicitly aligned with the work of Modernists like James Joyce, and utilising the latest cultural theories to emerge from continental thought. In attempting to revive a vivid, if often lapsed, vocabulary of rural Scots, MacDiarmid was bringing some aspects of contemporary psychological and linguistic theory into play, arguing in 1923 that 'old words, now obsolete or obsolescent, often retain an unexhausted evolutionary momentum'.[7] The idea that the folk-memory of a people rooted to the land could persist in the words and phrases resurrected from Jamieson's dictionary, in order to express the modern experience of their descendents, is surely of a distinctively Jungian cast. Such ideological strategies had been experimented with in Ireland by Yeats's 'Celtic Twilight', which had fed into Scottish culture through writers associated with the work of the polymathic environmental

[6] Gavin Sprott, 'Lowland Country Life'. *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. T.M. Devine & R.J. Finlay. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996. pp.170-187; p.171.
[7] Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Scottish National*, 15 May 1923, quoted by W.N. Herbert, *To Circumjack MacDiarmid*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p.27

thinker, Patrick Geddes, in his 'Celtic renascence' periodical, *The Evergreen*. Such ideas also converged with some of the new models of 'human ecology' being promoted by Geddes and his circle, as we shall see. Geddes was a profound influence on MacDiarmid, and his early suggestion of a revival of Scottish culture at the turn of the century was certainly part of the inspiration for MacDiarmid's efforts towards a 'Scottish Renaissance' in the 1920s.[8] However, MacDiarmid's cultural movement aimed to do away with the limitations of backward-looking provincialism and rural sentimentality which he and his contemporaries believed the Celtic Twilight and the Kailyard schools had perpetuated in previous decades. MacDiarmid stated his intention, in this project, to 'adapt an essentially rustic tongue to the very much more complex requirements of our urban civilisation'.[9]

It is not entirely clear whether he succeeded, if the value of MacDiarmid's 'Synthetic Scots' is to be measured by its ability to represent urban experience. It is true that certain aspects of city experience and political issues are evoked in some of MacDiarmid's early poetry, such as the lyric 'The Dead Liebknecht' from *Penny Wheep*, or his lengthy Scots masterpiece, 'A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle' (1926). However, the

[8] As MacDiarmid acknowledges, in 'A New Movement in Scottish Literature'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. p.6
[9] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Introducing Hugh M'Diarmid'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. p.10

vast majority of his lyrics written in Scots are based on country life, natural phenomena, and metaphysical contemplations; a thematic focus which may seem to be more closely aligned to the Scottish neo-Romantic tradition than the cutting-edge Modernist aesthetics and political questions raised by MacDiarmid's prose writings. An unusual choice, perhaps, given MacDiarmid's communist politics, his subject matter is less surprising when one considers the poet's typical home environment, choosing to live in provincial towns like Langholm and Montrose, or remote rural locales, such as Whalsay in the Shetland Isles. As others have argued recently, far from preventing MacDiarmid from engaging with international politics or Modernism, such provincial locations actually energised his work.[10] Equally, MacDiarmid's fascination with the natural world is not merely some escapist indulgence. In 1943, Hugh MacDiarmid wrote in his autobiography, *Lucky Poet*, that 'I find it necessary in my poetry and other writings to draw . . . largely on the Scottish landscape' since:

> modern ecology has destroyed the delusion which encouraged people to jeer at any suggestion of geographic 'control' and human 'response' to such control. . . today physiology and psychology are agreed that there is a relation, a functional relation, between an organism and its environment. [11]

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[10] See Robert Crawford's chapter on 'Modernism as Provincialism' in *Devolving English Literature*. 2nd Edn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. pp.216-270.
[11] Hugh MacDiarmid. *Lucky Poet: a self study in literature and political ideas*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1994; 1943. p.310

MacDiarmid is remarkable in that he is one of the very first British literary figures to use the term 'ecology', and probably the earliest Scottish writer explicitly to apply ecological thought to his own work. His familiarity with the concept is likely to have been the result of contact with the environmental thinker (and acquaintance of Ernst Haeckel, the pioneering botanist who coined the term 'Oekologie' in the 1860s) Patrick Geddes, and later, his reading of the Highland ecologist, Frank Fraser Darling – a connection which will be considered in more detail in Chapter 4. If it is the case, as MacDiarmid suggests in an essay for the 1934 miscellany *Scottish Scene*, that there is 'an extraordinary dearth,' in Scottish writing, 'of first-hand observation, intimate knowledge and loving particularity' which 'show[s] a real knowledge of nature', then MacDiarmid's own work might fill part of that void.[12] Scottish rural or wild landscapes do indeed feature prominently throughout MacDiarmid's early poetry, as they do in what he called his 'global' poems, written towards the end of the 1930s and later, such as 'In Memoriam James Joyce' and the Gaelic-influenced *Direadh* sequences.[13]

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[12] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Future'. *Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn.* London: Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., 1934. p.336

[13] MacDiarmid describes 'In Memoriam James Joyce' as a 'global poem', 'In Memoriam James Joyce', *Selected Prose.* Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. pp.220-238; p.224

In addition to his sensitive portrayal of rural scenes, a particularly striking characteristic of MacDiarmid's initial poetic output is the frequent appearance of the planet Earth viewed from outer space - a startlingly original viewpoint which appears to have few correspondences with his contemporaries. Perhaps MacDiarmid found inspiration for these earth-lyrics through his reading of Charles Murray's 'Gin I Was God', which features a lively description of the 'braw birlin' earth', or the partial visualisations of the globe in some of Thomas Hardy's poetry, such as 'At a Lunar Eclipse' or 'In Vision I Roamed'.[14] 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', the poem which opens MacDiarmid's first collection of lyrics, is an unusual personification of the planet Earth evoked in vivid Scots, while 'Au Clair de la Lune', along with lyrics such as 'The Eemis Stane' or 'The Innumerable Christ', offers a glimpse of a fossilized Earth glimmering in space:

> The moonbeams kelter i' the lift,
> An' Earth, the bare auld stane,
> Glitters beneath the seas o' Space
> White as a mammoth's bane.
>
> An', lifted owre the gowden wave,
> Peers a dumfoun'ered Thocht,
> Wi' keethin sicht o' a' there is,

[14] See Charles Murray, 'Gin I Was God'. *Hamewith: The Complete Poems of Charles Murray.* Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press for the Charles Murray Memorial Trust, 1979. p.101; Thomas Hardy, *Collected Poems.* London: Macmillan, 1930. Other correspondences to this altered viewpoint can be found in science fiction of the period. For example, the Scottish writer David Lindsay features space travel as a motif in his fantasy novel, *Voyage to Arcturus* (1920).

An' bodily sicht o' nocht.[15]

The chilly Scots vocabulary transmits the eeriness of this transfigured vantage point, an altered perspective in both space and time. This God's-eye view of the world is an outlook which is at once deliberately alienating, eccentric, and yet strikingly complete. The 'kelter' of moonbeams suggests movement, confusion, obscurity – 'kelter' may mean 'to tumble headlong', 'to wriggle, undulate, struggle' or, as a noun, denotes 'a covering, disguise, garment' – whilst 'keethin sicht' indicates either miraculous revelation or the flickering movement of a fish underwater.[16] Making use of the onomatopoeic suggestiveness of the vocabulary itself (as he did later with geological terminology in 'On a Raised Beach'[17]), MacDiarmid's lyric gives the impression of a world of shadows and distortions; however, the solid, stony Earth remains at the core of the poem, providing a focus to this metaphysical scene. In this and other respects it bears a close resemblance to another of MacDiarmid's eerie Scots lyrics, 'The Eemis Stane', itself an evocation of a stony Planet Earth rocking unsteadily on its axis, the 'yowdendrift' of 'eerie memories' distorting the cosmic viewer's sight. MacDiarmid's imagination vaults

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[15] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Au Clair de la Lune'. *Complete Poems 1920-1976*. 2 vols. Ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken. London: Martin, Brian & O'Keefe, 1993-1994. pp.23-25.
[16] *Concise Scots Dictionary*; Gloss, Hugh MacDiarmid. *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Alan Riach. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
[17] Discussed in Chapter 4. See also W.N. Herbert, *To Circumjack MacDiarmid: The Poetry and Prose of Hugh MacDiarmid*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p.161

from scenes of Scottish rural life to other-worldly vistas, swinging into orbit to gain a view of the globe from outside itself, whilst retaining a sense of specific individual experience, embedded in local environments. This swoop from the universal to the particular and *vice-versa* indicates a recognition of what Patrick Geddes identified in early twentieth-century Geography as a central axis of world-knowledge, with 'two poles of thought, cosmic and regional'.[18] MacDiarmid's poetry speaks of his attempts to integrate these apparently oppositional ways of seeing into his own world-view.

By the 1950s, MacDiarmid had moved on from the lyric to the more 'epic' scale of his 'Mature Art', contending, in his commentary on 'In Memoriam James Joyce' that:

> Our consciousness is beginning to be planetary. A new tension has been set up between the individual and the universe. It is not new because poets and entire literatures have been lacking in the sense of the vastness of Creation, but new in the response provoked in the writer in relation to his own language and his own environment.[19]

This 'planetary consciousness', MacDiarmid felt, could only be expressed by 'epic' poetry, a poetry which celebrates 'diversity in unity' (a favourite MacDiarmid catchphrase) and which can encompass both the universal

[18] Patrick Geddes, 'Nature Study and Geographical Education'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Vol. XIX (1903), 525-536. p.526
[19] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Memoriam James Joyce'. *Selected Prose*. p.224

and the particular.[20] MacDiarmid's ultimate rejection of the lyric form was based on his argument that the short lyric 'cannot reflect the complexities of modern life . . . [and] ignores . . . the enormous new perspective of the sciences'.[21] This move from lyric to epic scales of poetry is thus explicitly linked to the development of scientific perspectives, and seems to be allied with a rejection of humanism, too, since this is 'based upon exclusion, selection, discipline' in contrast to science, which 'seeks all, everywhere: and literature must follow suit'.[22]

The lyric, then, might seem too stylistically constricting, and too anthropocentric for MacDiarmid's wish for 'global' poetry, unable to synthesise the 'new perspectives' offered by science, ecology among them. However, in the twenties and early thirties MacDiarmid had argued equally strongly for the ability of the lyric to provide such 'new perspectives', exploring the possibilities of lyric as a variety of modernist discourse with the potential to facilitate 'Seeing the universe with entirely different eyes'.[23] Paralleling his investigations into the 'potentialities of the Doric. . . in accord with the newest and truest tendencies of human

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[20] See Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid' (1952), *Selected Prose*. . Ed. Alan Riach. Edinburgh: Carcanet, 1992. p.209

[21] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Metaphysics and Poetry: An Interview with Walter Perrie.' *Selected Prose*. p. 278

[22] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Assault on Humanism.' *The Raucle Tongue: Selected Essays, Journalism and Interviews*. Vol. I. 3 Vols. Ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray & Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1996-1998. pp.109-112; p. 111

[23] Hugh MacDiarmid in 'Beyond Meaning'. *The Raucle Tongue*. Vol.I. pp.162-171; p.164

thought', MacDiarmid's adaptive use of the lyric in his early Scots poetry is as crucial to the development of his unique outlook on nature-human relationships as his later 'scientific' poetry.[24] Looking to diverse international sources for examples of lyrical modernism and altered viewpoints, MacDiarmid found encouragement in the writings of Edwin Muir, the futurist poet Giovanni Papini, the American 'naturalistic-mystic' Waldo Frank, and others. Rejecting 'other forms of literary art, narrative or dramatic' in favour of lyric forms, Papini insists 'We of today feel poetry, that poetry which is absolutely poetic and intimately alive even in its unspoken implications - we feel the lyric.'[25] The lyric form, MacDiarmid suggests, can provide the modern poet with:

> a new synthesis of consciousness . . . a synthesis which will dissolve the pains of beauties, of disrupting machinery, the strange souls of crowds, into a more serene equilibrium, a synthesis which harmonises with the great discoveries of modern science and modern nescience.[26]

Indeed, despite the limitations of structure and scale, MacDiarmid's Scots lyrics retain a sense of unity, of completeness, which his 'epic' poetry, often breathless and ragged, does not so easily achieve. MacDiarmid's form of lyrical modernism brought together human psychology and the natural world in new ways. This is more than just the enduring influence

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[24] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'A Theory of Scots Letters.' *Selected Prose*. p.19
[25] Quoted by Hugh MacDiarmid in 'Beyond Meaning'. *The Raucle Tongue*. Vol.I. pp.162-171; p.163
[26] *Ibid*. p.170

of nineteenth-century romanticism – indeed, romanticism, and what it had degenerated into, was something MacDiarmid explicitly sought to avoid. Just as, in the 1920s, Synthetic Scots was the only idiom MacDiarmid felt was capable of representing the complex entanglements of man and environment in the modern world, the compact musicality of the lyric could be harnessed to express the reality of a cairn or the cosmos, as the poet saw fit. That the outlooks of scientific and poetic inquiry are linked was recognised early on by MacDiarmid, whose short 1922 poem, 'Science and Poetry' reveals the Earth as a planet, this time not the post-apocalyptic vision of 'Au Clair de la Lune' but as a living, yet fragile, world:

> To me, as to Galileo, crying
> 'Earth is a star, a star,' . . .
> And all that men are and have
> Is one green-gleaming point of light
> In infinite night.[27]

MacDiarmid's early lyrics, particularly those written in Scots, reveal networks of thought, feeling and natural phenomena, conveying a sense of synthesis, of 'diversity in unity'. The Scots words allow for complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, enclosed within the formal harmony of the lyric itself. 'Empty Vessel', published in *Penny Wheep*, reflects this constant shifting of perspective from global to local:

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[27] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Science and Poetry' (1922). *Complete Poems*, Vol. II. p.1220

I met ayont the cairney
A lass wi' tousie hair
Singin' till a bairnie
That was nae langer there.

Wunds wi' warlds to swing
Dinna sing sae sweet,
The licht that bends owre a' thing
Is less ta'en up wi't.[28]

Both 'Empty Vessel' and 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' have been interpreted in the past as evidence of MacDiarmid's rejection of metaphysical transcendence, finding in favour of the individual human life against the impassive forces of the universe. Catherine Kerrigan argues that the contrast between the individual human and the cosmos in 'Empty Vessel' is representative of 'the expansiveness of human emotion in the face of a vast and timeless universe'.[29] Certainly, such observations are valid; the girl's grief in 'Empty Vessel' is prioritised over cosmic forces, the action of the poem taking place beside a cairn – a specifically Scottish, local marker of human existence within the natural environment, a point at which human culture and natural landscape, living memory and the reality of death, merge. The young mother's sorrow is contrasted with 'wunds wi' worlds tae swing' and the inter-stellar 'licht' enveloping the universe. However, the evocation of these

[28] *Ibid.* p. 66
[29] See, for example, Catherine Kerrigan. *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid, 1920-1934.* Edinburgh: Thin, 1983. p.71

cosmic elements is also suggestive of motherly care; a baby swung in its mother's arms, a mother bending over an infant in its crib. Equally, as Nancy Gish notes in her commentary on 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', the image of the crying earth 'says simply that when it rains you cannot see the stars', but that it also ensures that 'earth becomes suddenly the one solid, defined, and acknowledged reality, carrying with it an undissipated significance' - and a specifically human significance at that.[30] But I would argue that what we have here is not merely the juxtaposition of human interest with the blind forces of the universe, but perhaps a paralleling, even a suggestion of connection, between the two. The components of MacDiarmid's Scots lyrics are both specific and non-specific, the elements transcendent yet bound to a kind of locality which can only be made sense of when linked to human experience; the personified Earth brings the cosmos down to an understandable, distinctively local - and colloquial - level.

A consciousness of interrelationships between individuals, societies and their environments is at the heart of modern ecology, with the growing idea that the land itself, as the American environmental writer, Aldo Leopold, suggests, 'is a community to which we belong'.[31] Such a sense of

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[30] Nancy Gish. *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and His Work*. London: Macmillan, 1984. p.40
[31] Aldo Leopold, 'The Land Ethic', quoted by Peter J. Bowler in *The Norton History of the Environmental Sciences*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. p.515.

networks and interconnection was beginning to be developed in the early years of the twentieth century through the efforts of the new 'Universal Geography' promoted by MacDiarmid's friend Patrick Geddes in his educational projects and on the pages of the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Indeed, it was thanks largely to the efforts of Geddes and his circle that geography had been included in the Scottish school curriculum by the turn of the century, just as Geddes had helped to introduce Biology as a school subject in the 1890s. Geography, in Scotland and France in particular, was beginning to move away from the practices of exploration and map-making which had hitherto been its most defining features. Indeed, James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon's geographically-themed studies, including his first book, *Hanno, or The Future of Exploration* (1928) and *Nine Against the Unknown* (1934) reflect this changing emphasis, the first pointing towards the future exploration of the cosmic environment, and the second a more jaded view of the adventure impulse, in which the boyish optimism of nineteenth-century writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson is substituted for the post-First World War knowledge that the realities of human endeavour tend to fall short of romance.[32]

Aldo Leopold is the author of *Sand County Almanac*, published posthumously in 1949, a 'founding document of modern American environmentalism'. (Bowler, p.514)

[32] James Leslie Mitchell / Lewis Grassic Gibbon. *Hanno, or The Future of Exploration.* London & New York, 1928; *Nine Against the Unknown.* Edinburgh : Polygon, 2000; 1934.

Indeed, the links between geographic exploration and imperial conquest were only too keenly felt, and were beginning to be seen as outmoded ways of viewing the world. A.J. Herbertson remarked to Patrick Geddes that 'imperial patriotism is a middle nineteenth century conception which is too small for this intimately related world of the twentieth century,'[33] whilst Geddes commented on the limitations of traditional geographical representation, the 'familiar map of the world' in which a 'shrunken landscape. . . [is] kept in order by its abstract and imaginary lines'.[34] Always keen to make knowledge accessible, Geddes's frustration with the dry abstraction of traditional geography – as well as the morbid, destructive force of conventional biological science, which he criticises in *The Evergreen* and elsewhere – led him to seek for alternative means of representation, innovative educational tools which placed the environmental sciences at the forefront of his imagination. Geddes' radically new conception of what 'geography' meant can be seen from his manuscript notes in preparation for an 'Introductory Course of Geography given at University College Dundee', in which he jots down an 'emphasis on sight, emotion, experience', an 'awareness of locality'

[33] A.J. Herbertson, Letter to Patrick Geddes, quoted by Morag Bell in 'Reshaping boundaries: international ethics and environmental consciousness in the early twentieth century.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 23(2), 1998, pp. 151-175.
[34] Patrick Geddes. 'The Mapping of Life'. *The Sociological Review*, Vol. XVI (July 1924). p. 194

and a method of observation which even relies upon 'odour, taste and memory'.[35]

The new form of Geographical study was rapidly recognised as an 'essentially synthetic' discipline, the point at which the various strands of scientific thought met and could be transformed into a more comprehensive view of the world. [36] Geographical knowledge relied upon acute powers of observation, an aptitude which the geographer shared with the poet or artist. Patrick Geddes, writing in 1904, offered a dramatic redefinition of the geographer, which seems to suggest the sort of 'planetary consciousness' which MacDiarmid later hoped his poetry could express.

> The geographer's is thus the comprehensive concrete mind, answering to, and supplementing with the needed facts, the philosopher's upon its abstract level. He takes all the various results of the different sciences and reunites them into a series of living and characteristic world-scenes, in which latitude, configuration and relief, rocks and soils, climate and rainfall, flora and fauna, nature races and civilised races, industries and institutions. . .even ideas and ideals – are all expressed as the elements of an intelligible and interacting whole – the dramatic unity of the World and man – say, also of Man in his world.[37]

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[35] Patrick Geddes. Notes for an Introductory Course of Geography given at University College Dundee (Spring 1898) Geddes Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 10619.
[36] A.J. Herbertson. 'Geography in the University'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1902. p.126
[37] Patrick Geddes. *A Study in City Development: Park, Gardens, and Culture-Institutes.* Dunfermline: The Riverside Press, 1904. p.113

Geddes is perhaps best known for his pioneering role in town planning and civic studies, with his contribution to civic planning in Israel and India, his theoretical writings on the planning of urban environments, and his plans and proposals for civic improvements at locations throughout the United Kingdom. It is, however, his unique combination of geographical and civic studies, together with his abiding research interests in biology, sociology and culture which make Geddes such a crucial figure in the development of environmental thinking in Scotland and elsewhere.[38] Geddes's diverse array of interests and scholarly friends testify to the synthetic potential of geographic study in early twentieth-century Scotland. Geddes's involvement in the development of environmental science is demonstrated by his engagement with the discourses of 'universal geography' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This 'new geography' was essentially the academic study of environmentalism, of how natural landscapes influence human society and settlement, and how human activities in turn modify the environment. His Edinburgh Summer School, which, had 'By the mid 1890s. . . become a major international cultural event' attracted European intellectuals including the geographer Elisée Reclus, Ernst Haeckel and

[38] The significance of Geddes's thought to environmentalism has been suggested by Marshall Stalley in *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*. Ed. Marshall Stalley. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1972.

the anarchist philosopher Pytor Kropotkin.[39] Reclus, a prominent anarchist thinker and the foremost 'universal' geographer of his time, was the author of *Geographie Universelle*, which first appeared as a series of pamphlets in 1875, preceded by *La Terre* (1868) subtitled, in its English translation, as 'a descriptive history of the phenomena of the life of the globe'. Geddes was thus situated at the hub of a network of thinkers who were exploring new ways of conceptualising human existence in its relationship to the environment. In *The Evergreen*, Geddes expressed his view of the essential unity of the arts and the environmental sciences, saying that the naturalist does not begin with the study of 'dead anatomy', but 'by wandering deep into the forest and high upon hill; in seeing, in feeling, with hunter and savage, with husbandman and gypsy, with the poet and with the child'.[40]

MacDiarmid and Patrick Geddes became friends towards the end of Geddes' life, in the late twenties and early thirties, but MacDiarmid had been interested in some aspects of the new environmental sciences even before then. In 1918, under the auspices of the Army Education Scheme, he gave a series of lectures on 'Political & Commercial Geography' and

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[39] W. Iain Stevenson. *Patrick Geddes and Geography: A Bibliographical Study*. Occasional Paper No.27. University College London, March 1975. p.4

[40] Patrick Geddes. 'Life and its Science'. *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal*. Spring 1895, 29-37. p.31

'Civic and Town Planning' while convalescing in the south of France.[41] In the years before the Great War he had also been involved in research into the 'rural problem' for the Fabian Research Committee on agriculture, claiming to have 'surveyed the whole Scottish aspect of the matter'.[42] MacDiarmid was later to comment on his admiration for Geddes's strivings towards synthesis, his blurring of academic boundaries in an attempt to achieve comprehension and insight. In *The Company I've Kept*, MacDiarmid relates Geddes's sometimes meandering trajectory to patterns within his own work, citing Lewis Mumford's comment that Geddes 'practiced synthesis in an age of specialism', and claiming that this was 'the very practice that has been the theme of all my later poetry and work as a teacher and publicist'.[43] He declares his shared interests with Geddes as:

> Form, pattern, configuration, organism, historical filiation, ecological relationship and concepts that work up and down the ladder of the sciences; the aesthetic structure and the social relations are as real as the primary physical qualities that the sciences were once content to isolate.[44]

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[41] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Letter to George Ogilvie, June 1918.' *Collected Letters*. Ed. Alan Bold. London: Hamilton, 1984. p.26

[42] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid'. (1952) *Selected Prose*. p.203. Under the pseudonym of Arthur Leslie, MacDiarmid says that he 'submitted a series of brilliant memoranda which formed part of the joint volume *The Rural Problem* [London: Constable, 1913]'.

[43] Hugh MacDiarmid. *The Company I've Kept*. London: Hutchinson, 1966. p.79

[44] *Ibid.* pp.80-81

The Outlook Tower in Edinburgh (see Figure 1) was Geddes's first experimental educational museum, and was, as MacDiarmid outlines in an article for *The Scottish Nation*:

> designed to aid both citizen and visitor towards a better understanding of Edinburgh, not only as a city with world-wide connections or as primarily capital of Scotland, but as, today not less than in the past, a Burgh central in, and intimately connected with, the life of its Region.[45]

Not only that, it juxtaposed images of the globe itself with this detailed survey of Edinburgh and its region – a characteristic of the new universal geography. Robert Crawford has suggested that the Outlook Tower bears some comparison with Joyce's *Ulysses*, in order 'to illustrate the modern and Modernist implications of much of Geddes's work'.[46] Geddes's efforts towards new visualisations of the human organism within its environment are certainly in keeping with the experimentation in representations and viewpoints which poets and writers like MacDiarmid or Joyce were attempting. However, the Outlook Tower is directly representative of Geddes's engagement with the new perspectives fostered by the environmental sciences of biology, geography, even sociology and psychology. The tower's progression from 'world' to

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[45] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Outlook Tower'. *The Raucle Tongue: Selected Essays, Journalism and Interviews*. Vol. I. Ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray & Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1996-1998. p. 131

[46] Robert Crawford, 'MacDiarmid and English Identity'. *The Literature of Region and Nation*. Ed. R.P. Draper. London: Macmillan Press, 1989. p.149

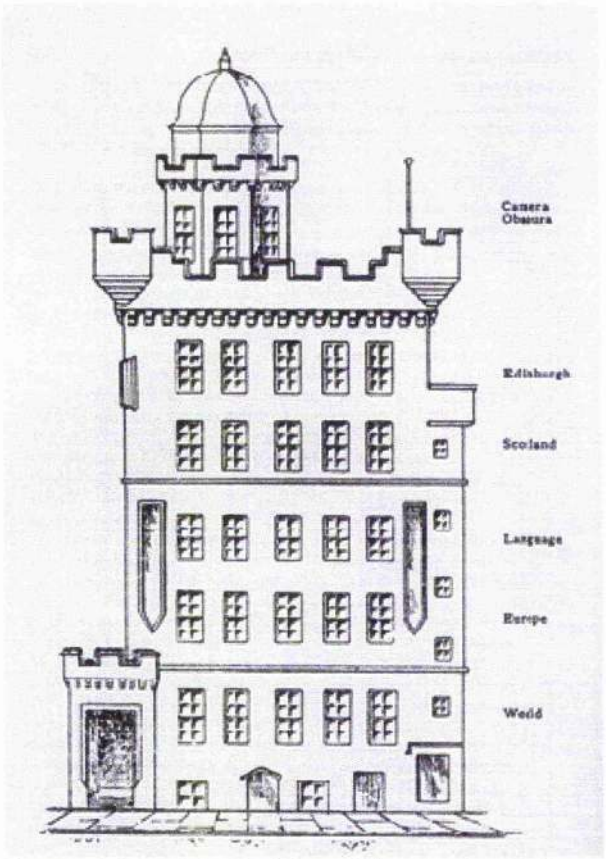

Figure 1: Patrick Geddes, 'The Outlook Tower'. *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*. Ed. Marshall Stalley. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1972.

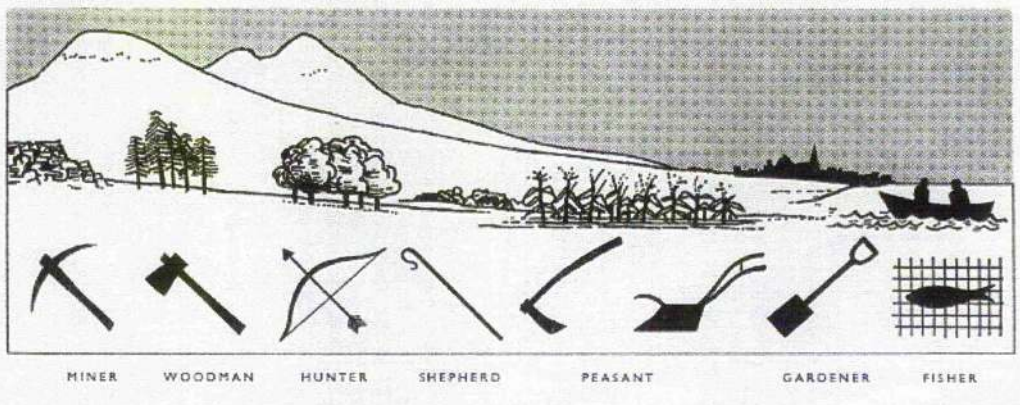

Figure 2: Patrick Geddes, 'The Valley Plan of Civilisation'. *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*. Ed. Marshall Stalley. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1972.

region (Edinburgh and its environs) reflects Universal Geography's basic premise of relating the local to the global. Geddes's concept of 'Region' is informed by his reading of Frederic Le Play's sociological writings, transforming the interconnective model of *Lieulle/Travaille/Famille* to the more locally-appropriate trinity of Place/Work/Folk, to indicate the interdependence of geography, economics and culture.[47] As the American regionalist writer, Donald Davidson notes, 'place conditions work, work conditions the family organisation, and the family is the social unit which makes up geography'.[48] Geddes's interest in the region certainly parallels and perhaps influences MacDiarmid's own interest in local organisations and local environments, and the connection between the universal and the particular, valued in his poetry. Geddes's view of regionalism also had political implications which MacDiarmid would have found interesting:

> Regionalism begins by recognising that while centralisation to great capitals was inevitable, and in some measure permanent, this is no longer completely necessary. . .The increasing complexity of human affairs. . .has enabled the great centres to increase and retain their control; yet their continued advance is also rendering decentralisation, with government of all kinds, increasingly possible.[49]

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[47] See W. Iain Stevenson. *Patrick Geddes and Geography: A Biobibliographical Study*. London: Department of Geography, University College, London, 1975. p.2

[48] Donald Davidson. *The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962. p.45.

[49] Patrick Geddes. *A Study in City Development: parks, gardens and culture-institutes: a report to the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust*. Dunfermline: n.pub., 1904. p.216

Geddes viewed the region as a discrete geographical and a temporal entity. Any section of a region, Geddes proposed, represented a specific way in which human beings had related to and lived off the land, since the dawn of civilisation, in a series of livelihoods which related to specific primordial environments, and had evolved into increasingly more sophisticated occupations (See Figure 2, 'The Valley Plan of Civilisation').[50] So, hunter eventually becomes soldier, peasant evolves into banker, and in each modern occupation lies the germ of a primitive 'functional relation' between the human organism and its environment. Similar concepts appear in the work of regional novelists such as Neil Gunn, for whom 'A person's true personality is the archetypal primitive – that of hunter or fisher, maker, searcher, or gazer on bright water'.[51] Certainly, Geddes' view of the region as locus of both history and geography is in tune with certain literary manifestations of the Jungian collective unconsciousness, or the idea that folk memory is held within the land itself – a feature of work by Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Neil Gunn.[52] These perspectives are in fact aligned with early discourses of environmentalism, which are essentially the study of how the

[50] Patrick Geddes. 'Talks from the Outlook Tower: The Third Talk - The Valley Plan of Civilisation'. Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment. Ed. Marshall Stalley. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1972. pp.321-333. See also Patrick Geddes, 'Edinburgh and Its Region, Geographic and Historical'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. XIX (1903).pp.302-312.

[51] Thomas Crawford. 'The View from the North'. *The Literature of Region and Nation*. London: MacMillan Press, 1989. p.112

[52] Discussed by Douglas Gifford in *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1983.

environment moulds the development of the individual, and the community in general. Thus, questions of regional survey, whether mediated through the Outlook Tower or through Geddes's other environmental schema, were indeed related to some of the currents within Modernist cultural thought. A regional survey sought to gain a comprehensive view of these interconnecting factors, looking at all the characteristics of the region in synthesis, rather than tackling them separately. The Outlook Tower provided both the opportunity to survey the landscape from a height, but to relate this general view to the particular details of geology, botany, zoology, and the sociological and economic factors which drew town and countryside, individual and community, into a complex web of interrelations - a swoop from the universal to the particular which is a fundamental characteristic of MacDiarmid's poetry, from the early lyrics to the later 'poetry of facts'.

Perhaps the most characteristic example of Geddes's efforts towards synthesis is his unrealised - and much overlooked - plan for a National Institute of Geography (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). First outlined in 1902 in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, the plan was an audacious one backed by a number of prominent geographers and intellectuals including Elisée Reclus, James Bryce (the mountaineering Liberal M.P.) and A.J. Herbertson. In many ways this plan encapsulates Geddes's way of

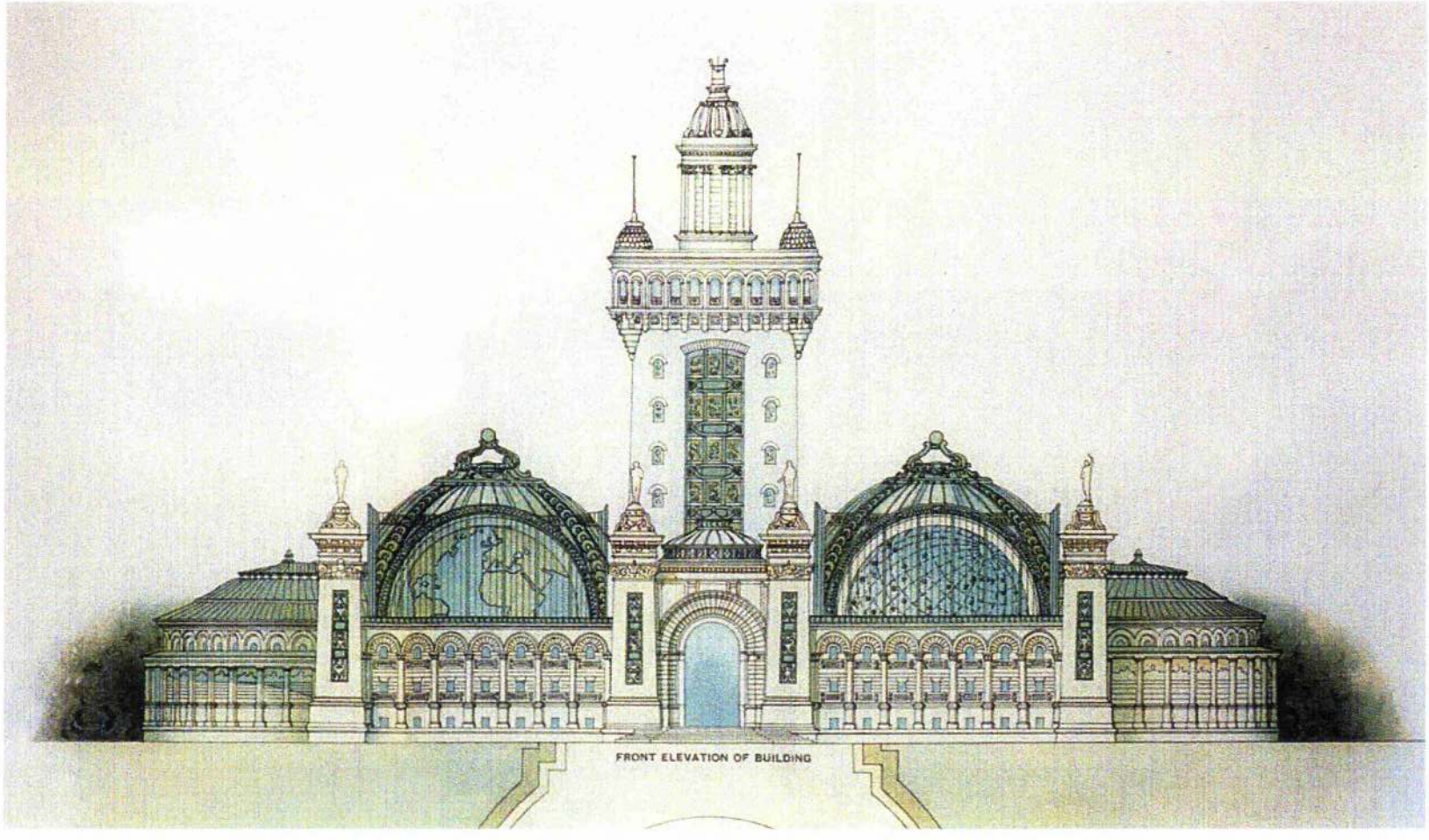

Figure 3 : Front Elevation, Patrick Geddes & M. Galeron, 'Suggested Plan for a National Institute Of Geography'. *The Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. XVIII (1902).

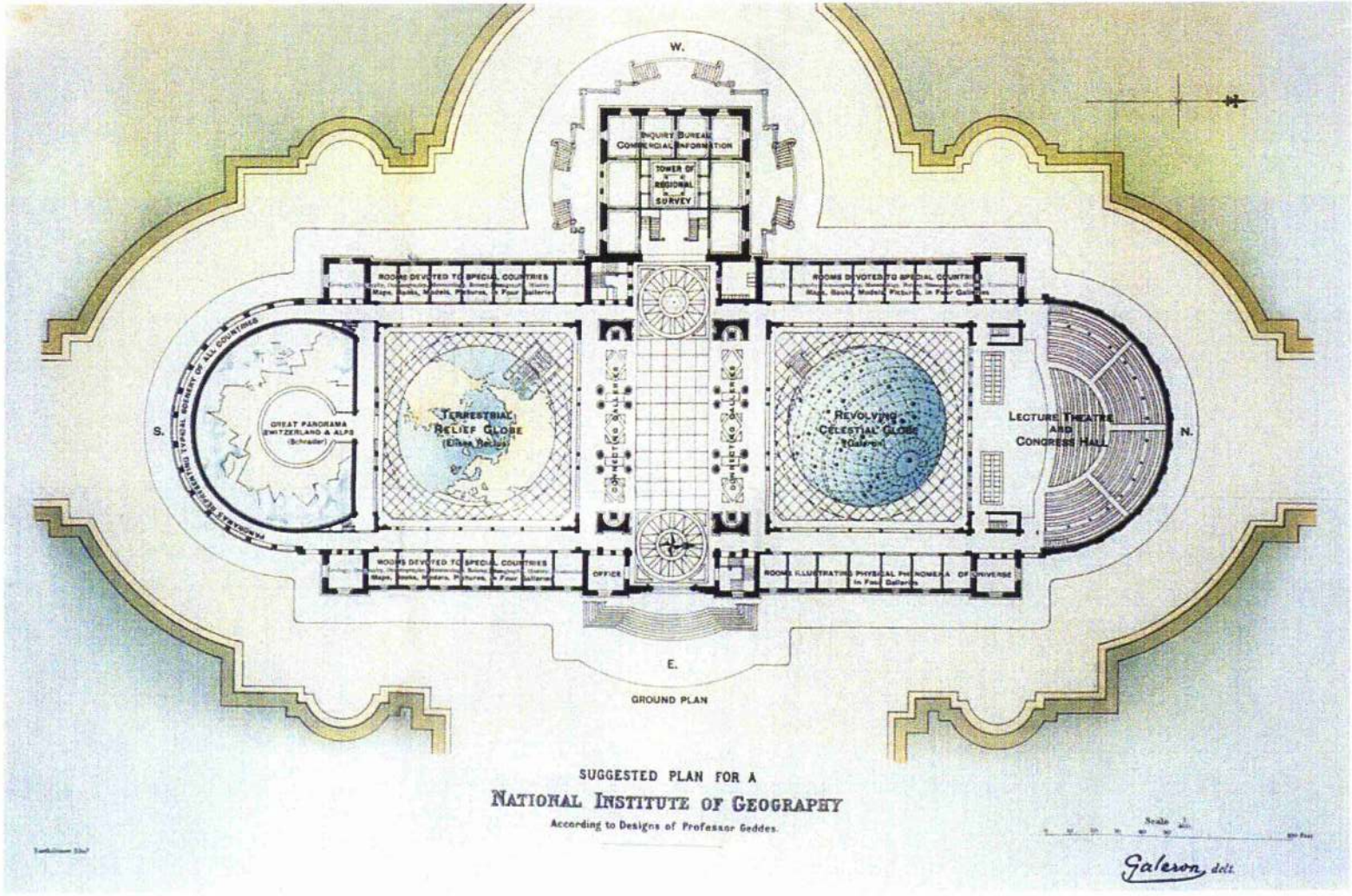

Figure 4: Ground Plan, Patrick Geddes & M. Galeron, 'Suggested Plan for a National Institute of Geography'. *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. XVIII (1902).

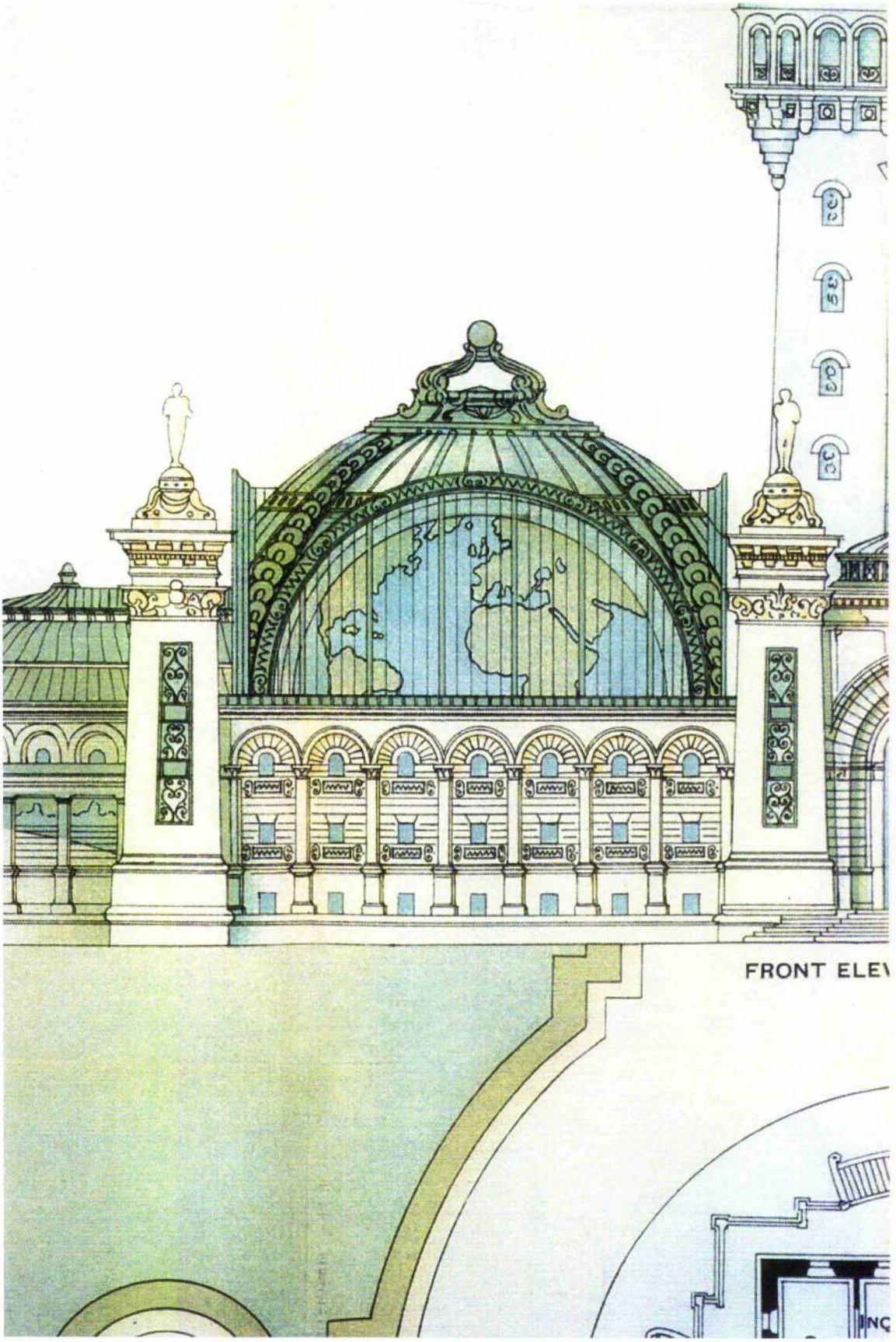

Figure 5 : M. Elisée Reclus's 'Great Relief Globe'. Detail from Patrick Geddes & M.Galeron, 'Suggested Plan for a National Institute of Geography'. *The Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. XVIII (1902).

thinking about the world. Its logically-arranged yet puzzlingly diverse layout of themes and ideas, its provoking juxtaposition of materials and perspectives, could have made the institute into a large-scale version of one of his 'thinking machines', the diagrams which Geddes created in order to condense his socio-geographical methods of thinking and observation into a readily accessible form.

This proposed National Institute of Geography was to be a much more ambitious project than the Outlook Tower, comprising a more complex 'Tower of Regional Survey'. But what is perhaps most striking about this proposal are the plans for the inclusion of Elisée Reclus' great Terrestrial Globe, a huge relief model of the Earth itself, eighty feet in diameter (see Figure 5).[53] The considerable scale and meticulous detail of this representation of the planet suggests an entirely new perspective on the world and humanity's place in it. Globes had, of course, long been used as the tool of the cartographer, the navigator, and the commercial geographer, however the sheer scale of this globe surely marks it out as something more radical than a mere atlas. Planned as it was to

[53] See Patrick Geddes. 'Note on Draft Plan for Institute of Geography'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Vol. XVIII (1902) p.143. The globe was part of an ongoing project, separate from the plans for the geographical institute. Geddes provides further details of the globe project in his obituary for Reclus: '1895-96 – *Projet de Construction d'un Globe Terrestre* on the scale of 1:100,000'. Patrick Geddes, 'A Great Geographer: Elisée Reclus, 1830-1905'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Vol.XXI (1905). p.554. Abbie Ziffren notes in her 'Biography of Patrick Geddes' that the globe project's '$1 million price tag warded off...would-be investors', in Marshall Stalley (Ed.) *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1972. p.36

complement M. Galeron's equally massive Celestial Globe, together with panoramas of various landscapes, map-rooms and libraries, and the regional survey method represented in the tower, Reclus's Terrestrial Globe might have seemed both in and out of context. The scheme had a dual potential; offering a holistic, totalising view of the earth, but at the same time a giddily bizarre perspective, accurate yet unreal. Today the Earth viewed from space has become a commonplace, but early on in the century the Earth as a planet was still largely known in theory, mapped in segments and only just beginning to be surveyed in glimpses from gas balloons and aeroplanes. 'Universal Geography' must have been an impressive and challenging concept, an attempt to gain concrete views of a hitherto abstracted Earth. One can only speculate whether MacDiarmid, during one of his many long discussions with Geddes, was exposed to these fascinating plans, and if so, whether these influenced his own representations of the planet Earth.

Whilst views of the physical earth were beginning to be developed in geography and education, the events and technological advances of the early twentieth century had brought home the significance of international contexts. Political, cultural and economic global outlooks were beginning to be recognised, with the experience of international conflict, the inception of international peace treaties, the formation of the

League of Nations in 1920, even the setting-up of cultural organisations such as the P.E.N. club, 'that remarkable international literary organisation' which MacDiarmid helped to set up.[54] This proliferation of international outlooks, of course, had as its corollary the development of nationalist allegiances. The dual nature of this new political scene had implications for geographer and cultural protagonist alike. Patrick Geddes's geographical protégé, A.J. Herbertson, argued in 1902 for the unique status of geographical study:

> The geographer . . . shows forth the dignity of Man in his achievements as a co-operator with Nature, and at the same time the humility of Man controlled by his environment. . . . A geographer is at once a patriot and an internationalist, keenly alive to the necessity of stimulating the full development of local activity and resources, yet worldwide in his outlook and sympathies. [55]

However, regionalism, despite Geddes' enthusiasm for the concept, was sometimes viewed with suspicion by Modernist writers such as MacDiarmid, who associated 'regionalism' with a provincial, backward outlook.[56] MacDiarmid had been stalking the cosmopolitan pages of *The New Age* – and a whole host of other magazines – since the 1910s, voicing the European trends which suited his eclectic brand of poetic inspiration.

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[54] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Whither Scotland?' *The Raucle Tongue*. Vol. III. pp.256-293.
[55] A.J. Herbertson. 'Geography in the University'. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, No.III (1902). pp.124-132; p.131
[56] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Arne Garborg, Mr Joyce, and Mr M'Diarmid.' *The Raucle Tongue*, Vol. I. p.234

He was particularly on the look-out for new ideas concerning poetic form, methods of representation and consciousness, and above all, linguistic potential. Jonathan Bate suggests in *The Song of the Earth* that Modernism is antithetical to ecological authenticity, the concept of 'dwelling' which has to involve groundedness, local knowledge - 'the essence of bioregionalism', as he puts it.[57] Modernism, Bate suggests, is 'wedded indissolubly to twentieth-century multinational capitalism', while the Modernist poet is 'notoriously deracinated', and is 'the very antithesis of the bioregionally grounded poet'.[58] Bate sets up a division between what he calls literary 'bioregionalism' and 'multinationalism' or 'cosmopolitanism' - in other words, the local and the global. This is quite an orthodox, unchallenging view of Modernism, and one which has now been questioned by critics such as Robert Crawford, who point to the importance of provincial, regional identities in the formation of many writers in the Modernist canon.[59] Certainly, regional identities were important to MacDiarmid, although he is sometimes keen to avoid the label of 'regionalist', fearing its negative associations with petty provincialism. However, MacDiarmid's fusion of the global and the local is in keeping with both 'ecology' and 'modernism', adapting the sort of

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[57] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2000. p.234
[58] *Ibid.* p.234
[59] For example, R. Crawford. *Devolving English Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. p.216

outlooks fostered by Geddes' education projects in his poetry and prose of the 1930s and 40s.

Questions of locality, more than anything else, dominated Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Scottish Scene* (1934).

> The names of all the Shetland Isles
> We rattle off like lightning thus,
> The Orkneys then, the Hebrides,
> Like coloured balls in an abacus.
>
> And Cunningham and Lennox
> And all our ancient provinces
> --No fool among us but in his mind
> Better than an ordnance survey sees![60]

This, a fragment from the poem, 'Scotland', Hugh MacDiarmid's opening contribution to *Scottish Scene,* sets about satirising the ignorance and apathy of the average Scot when it comes to knowledge of Scottish geography. The synoptic vision MacDiarmid would like to see instilled into every Scottish school child was perhaps more accessible to the multiple selves (and viewpoints) of C.M. Grieve than it was to the average person. He returns to this theme at the close of the book, in his essay 'The Future', remarking that the perpetuation of the distorted representations of the various regions of Scotland - Highland, Lowland

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[60] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Scotland', *Scottish Scene, or, The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn.* London : Jarrolds, 1934 pp.13-16; repr. *Complete Poems 1920-1976,* Vol.I. Ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken. London: Martin, Brian & O'Keefe, 1978. p.365

and Border – have served to obscure the true, diverse nature of the country to its inhabitants:

> Intranational elements of every kind have been obliterated in these false concepts as in an all-obliterating fog; the very regional names – Lennox, Cunningham, Rough Bounds, Angus and the Mearns, the Lammermuirs and the Merse – are not known and mean nothing even to the majority of the Scottish people.[61]

MacDiarmid suggests throughout *Scottish Scene* that there are no adequate surveys of Scotland or its regions by Scottish writers, either literary, scientific or sociological. 'Germs of promising novelistic regionalism have appeared', he says, alluding to his co-author's fictionalisation of the Mearns in *Sunset Song* and *Cloud Howe* (*Grey Granite*, the final book of the *Scots Quair* trilogy, had not yet been written). However, 'of descriptive essays and nature study scarcely a beginning has been made':

> With regard to any other country in Europe it is possible to get hold of good up-to-date books surveying the national position... Nothing of the sort is possible in respect of Scotland. There is no such book.[62]

An attentive, intuitive observation of the natural world together with the search for clarity of linguistic representation are two of MacDiarmid's obsessions in his later poetry – and are certainly related to this impulse to

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[61] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Future'. *Scottish Scene*, p.335.
[62] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Modern Scene'. *Scottish Scene*, pp.37-57; p.39.

'survey' the Scottish scene. Such concerns were reflected in later academic surveys such as the ecologist Frank Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey*, a project spanning a number of years which was eventually published in 1955. Neil Gunn, reviewing Frank Fraser Darling's *Survey*, suggested that it was successful due to 'inner knowledge' and 'long personal experience' stemming from direct involvement with the regional environment 'as a naturalist, [who] studied wild life on Rona... [and] as a crofter, [who] dug his own croft'.[63]

'Tam o' the Wilds', another of MacDiarmid's poems from *Scottish Scene*, is an endorsement of the nobility of life-long learning, and of appreciating the natural world by actively seeking to know it and understand it – and an example of the sort of 'ordnance survey' vision he talks about in 'Scotland'. In fact, Tam's vision is a more comprehensive one, his 'passion for nature and science', a motivation which few understand, leading to an acuteness of observation which few share:

> He had the seein' eye frae which naething could hide
> And nocht that cam' under his een was forgotten.
> Fluently and vividly he could aye efter describe
> The forms, and habits o' a' the immense
> Maingie o' animals he saw. . .[64]

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[63] Neil Gunn. 'Surveying the Highlands'. Neil Gunn Papers, National Library of Scotland. Dep.209. p.3

[64] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Tam o' the Wilds and the Many-Faced Mystery', *Scottish Scene*, pp.167-177; repr. Complete Poems. Vol. I. pp.368-379; p.377.

Tam, 'a common workin' man' has an interest in natural history which alienates him from his peers. In contrast to 'maist folk bogged in clish-ma-claver' or 'a solid basis o' dull conventions', Tam's lifestyle achieves synthesis and meaning, whilst these others:

> Miss a million times mair o' the wonders o' life
> Than Tam missed gi'en average routines the bye
> Night after night up a tree wi' the birds
> Or in a badger's hole or eagle's nest to lie.[65]

MacDiarmid introduces a series of stanzas which seem to anticipate his later poetry, chanting the diversity of the Scottish wildlife and landscape, the names of moths, birds, fish and mountains, suggesting that this sort of complex regional knowledge is of more value than that transmitted by the Scottish educational system. Tam is possibly based on Thomas Edwards, a Scottish self-taught naturalist MacDiarmid mentions in passing in an article for *Forward*. Edwards, he says, 'had no higher educational training at all, but had spent most of his time observing birds and other phenomena of natural history on the Banffshire coast'.[66] According to MacDiarmid, Ford Madox Ford said Edwards had influenced 'the formation of his prose style', and that 'the patient observation of natural history' was one of the crucial ingredients in the

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[65] *Ibid.* p.372

[66] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Memorial to William Stewart' (1948). *The Raucle Tongue*, Vol. III. pp.133-136; p.134

formation of the 'literary style of some of our best writers in English'.[67] He extends his argument about the inadequacy of Scottish school education in 'Tam o' the Wilds', arguing that:

> We're a' owre weel-educated noo I doot
> To ha'e ony real knowledge – or love o't – left
> And as for love o' auld Scotland itself
> And knowledge o't, fegs, Tam's pinkie kent
> Faur mair than the fower and hauf millions o's
> Livin' the day in oor heids ha'e pent![68]

All this is not so very far removed from Stevenson's arguments in 'An Apology for Idlers' that the best lessons are to be learned outdoors playing truant.[69] In *Lucky Poet*, MacDiarmid felt able to comment with pride on his achievements in fostering this sort of awareness, that one of the successes of the Scottish Renaissance was to facilitate 'a steadily increasing flow of better writing on Scottish topography and natural history'.[70] In his 'Direadh' poems, dedicated, like *Scottish Scene*, to Helen B. Cruikshank, we witness MacDiarmid in the act of performing such a survey, a 'synoptic' view of Scotland which bears some resemblances to the outlooks which Patrick Geddes was promoting earlier in the century. 'Direadh', as MacDiarmid notes, is 'a Gaelic word meaning "the act of surmounting"', suggesting that 'these poems attempt to give birds'-eye

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[67] *Ibid.* p.134
[68] 'Tam o' the Wilds', *Complete Poems*, Vol. I. p. 377.
[69] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'An Apology for Idlers'. *Virginibus Puerisque, and other papers.* London: Chatto & Windus. 1920. pp.71-82.
[70] Hugh MacDiarmid. *Lucky Poet.* p.282

views – or rather, eagles'-eye views – of the whole of Scotland, each from a different vantage point.'[71] The idea of surveying Scotland points back to MacDiarmid's wish for a more complete view of the country in the 1930s, and recalls Patrick Geddes's calls for a similarly comprehensive treatment. Indeed, 'Direadh I' (begun in the late thirties, but eventually published in 1974) seems to form part of a closed circuit with the aspirations MacDiarmid outlined in his contribution to *Scottish Scene*. Some of the lines appear to be lifted directly from the earlier book. His claim that 'All the destinies of my land are set before me. . . Like the lines on the palm of my hand' echoes the impossibly hyper-aware Scot in 'Scotland', for whom a litany of Scottish place names 'Like the lines on his hands are seen'. Scotland's

> Past, present, future – all
> Its history and its interests
> . . .
>
> Nor is the whole lost in the parts
> All Scotland seen . . .
> . . . as a unity. [72]

is echoed in 'Direadh', where 'Scotland [is] seen entire, | Past, present and future at once'. It seems clear that 'the wonderful diversity and innumerable | Sharp transitions of the Scottish scene' which MacDiarmid

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[71] *Ibid.* p.255
[72] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Scotland', *Scottish Scene*; repr. *Complete Poems*. Vol. I. pp.366-7.

celebrates in 'Direadh I' are evidence of a poetic project akin to regional survey in MacDiarmid's 1930s poetry. This sort of rhetoric recalls Auden's wish to see 'as the hawk ... or the helmeted airman' in the early 1930s poem, 'Consider', and indeed, MacDiarmid's demand for a Scottish survey is certainly related to the rise of documentary modes of observation - the work of the Scottish film-maker, John Grierson, for example, who collaborated with Auden on the 1936 film, *Night Mail* - a film which MacDiarmid might have participated in, if the deal had not fallen through.

MacDiarmid was, however, interested in the potential for documentary film and photography to provide new outlooks on Scotland. He writes about Grierson and other 'camera men' in 'Scottish Arts and Letters', an article originally published during the Second World War in 'The New Scotland: 17 Chapters on Scottish Re-construction, Highland and Industrial'.[73] Here, he talks about modern poetry's kinship with the new photographic arts, suggesting that 'camera men show far more enterprise and true originality' since 'They are far more closely in touch with the ramifications of modern life... the photographers still look out on the world with eyes of enquiry and wonder... lose themselves in the

[73] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Scottish Arts and Letters'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. pp.151-170.

fascination of all the marvels light reveals to a zealous observer, and in losing themselves find themselves. So may science liberate all men yet!'[74] In this respect, MacDiarmid's 'Direadh' poems, together with books like *Scottish Scene* can be set alongside documentary travelogues like J.B. Priestley's *English Journey* and Edwin Muir's counterpart, *Scottish Journey*, published in 1935, shortly after MacDiarmid and Gibbon's miscellany.[75] *Scottish Scene* reveals a 'composite picture' which is somewhat fragmented. The total effect is of a collage of opinion, tone, political stance and genre, with a series of loosely thematic sections, each culminating in a 'Newsreel', a series of press-cuttings which reveal the jumble of journalistic comment on Scottish affairs during the period. The localised sketches nevertheless allow for both writers to relate what they find in the Scottish locales to trans-national contexts, economic, sociological and anthropological, with MacDiarmid taking every opportunity to promote 'Douglasism' and Social Credit, and Gibbon pausing in his condemnation of Glasgow or his essay on 'The Antique Scene' to compound his Diffusionist theories. Edwin Muir's *Scottish Journey* is an interesting counterpoint to *Scottish Scene*. From first to last, Muir denies the possibility of an integrated vision of Scotland.

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[74] *Ibid.* pp.153-4.
[75] J.B. Priestley. *English Journey*. London: Heineman, 1984; 1934.

> Scotland itself could only be known by someone who had the power to live simultaneously in the bodies of all the men, women and children in it. I took a chance cut through it, stopping here and there, picking up this or that object, gathering shells whose meaning was often obscure or illegible to me. I did not find anything which I would call Scotland; anything, that is to say, beyond the vague and wandering image already impressed upon me by memory. . .[76]

His 'chance cut' through the country can only allow for a series of 'impressions', a melancholy sense of modernist fragmentation figured here in Muir's typically organic frame of reference, the Modern's experience figured as beach-combing, cut off from any real understanding of either the objects he finds or the environment he finds them in. In Muir's writing, processes of globalisation are acknowledged within the Scottish scene, with modern mass culture overwhelming the subtle, intuitive interrelationship between individual and place:

> The effect of all such innovations as the movies and the wireless is to make the place people stay in of less and less importance. Immediate environment has no longer, therefore, the shaping effect that it used to have. . .[77]

Muir foresees the possibilities indicated by the continued proliferation of these 'innovations', since, he argues, 'variety and originality of character are produced by an immediate and specific environment; and that, in modern life, counts for less and less; it is being disintegrated on every

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[76] Edwin Muir. *Scottish Journey*. Edinburgh & London: Mainstream Publishing, 1999; 1935. p. 243
[77] *Ibid.* p.24

side, and seems to be, indeed, a life-form of the past. It would be idle to regret this process, since it is inevitable'.[78] Despite his protestations to the contrary, one feels Muir did regret this; his awareness of the 'disintegration' of the links between character and local environment is related to the 'vast and terrifying disintegration' of the 'England of the organic community' F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson wrote of in *Culture and Environment* (1932).[79] Muir's suggestion – which was a well-established one, for example, in the writings of Henry David Thoreau in the nineteenth century – was that as much as natural landscapes mould individual personalities, human communities in touch with nature create ecologically-sound settlements:

> A town was once as natural an expression of a people's character as its landscape and its fields; it sprang up in response to a local and particular need; its houses, churches and streets were suited to the habits and nature of the people who lived in it. Industrialism, which is a mechanical cosmological power. . . has changed this.[80]

This echoes Leavis and Thompson, who pronounce a similar view on the rural towns of 'Old England', that the people 'themselves represented an adjustment to the environment; their ways of life reflected the rhythm of the seasons, and they were in close touch with the sources of their

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[78] *Ibid.* p.25

[79] F.R. Leavis & Denys Thompson. 'The Organic Community'. *The Green Studies Reader: from Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. pp.73-76 (p.73). From *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1964; 1933.

[80] Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey*. p.21

sustenance in the neighbouring soil'.[81] The stance was a seductive one, and is something which Gibbon himself finds attractive at times, but ultimately it needs to be resisted, not only for its susceptibility to the propaganda of right-wing ideologies, but also in order to avoid the invention of a sort of eco-kailyard.

Whilst Leavis and Thompson called for an English literature which would bridge the gap between their mythical 'Old England' and its supposed kinship with the soil, and the dislocated experience of modern England, in Scottish literature something quite different was going on. Writers like MacDiarmid and Gibbon were writing about rural experience which did not rely, and indeed was explicitly trying to get away from, sentiment and tradition. Gibbon's view emphasises his conviction of the innate 'peasant' connection with the soil, writing with pride of his background on the land and his sense that it is 'intimately mine', but it emphatically does not see 'back to nature' as either desirable or possible. Once again the cinema represents the average person's experience of modern globality, juxtaposed with what would once have been a cosily familiar picture of rural life, where 'the crofter may doze

[81] Leavis & Thompson. 'The Organic Community'. *The Green Studies Reader: from Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p.74

contentedly in the arm-chair in the ingleneuk', but, for the modern human is 'alien and unendurable'.[82]

Patrick Geddes, who wrote that the town is an expression of the diversity of its region, would have disagreed with the assertion that an organic community could not exist in one of the larger provincial towns. Indeed, this question is interesting to consider in the light of Lewis Grassic Gibbon and his trilogy of novels which track a generation of workers from the country to the regional city. As Raymond Williams has suggested in *The Country and the City* (1971), what makes Lewis Grassic Gibbon significant in the context of the regional novel is that he expresses the fundamentally regional, rural roots of urban populations, of the people who had to leave the land and its associations for a life in the industrial centres.[83] Gibbon is an important novelist, Williams argues, because he represents the authentic 'experience of the country – in its whole reality, from a love of the land and its natural pleasures to the imposed pain of deprivation, heavy and low-paid labour, loss of work and place' – an experience which the folk who moved from farm to factory knew well, but which the wider world did not appreciate or

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[82] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'The Land', *Scottish Scene*, pp.292-306; repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*. Ed. Valentina Bold. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2001. pp.81-97; p. 85

[83] Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973. pp.264-271.

understand. [84] While Gibbon feels a primal, instinctive connection with 'The Land' and its 'true, and unforgettable voice', he recognises the reality of 'narrowness and bitterness and heart-breaking toil in one of the most unkindly agricultural lands in the world' – an experience which, he suggests, while we are wise to remember, we are lucky to have safely in the past. [85]

Part of the fascination of the land is, for Gibbon, the sense that it is 'only half inanimate', a view of the landscape which, as noted in Williams' study, is common to many regional novels of the period. MacDiarmid's poem, 'Tarras', part of the collection *Scots Unbound* (1932), plays with this idea of animism, with a lively representation of a sexualised bogland, an 'erotic description of the earth as mother', with the aim in mind, as W.N. Herbert suggests, of 'the synthesis of language and environment in an all-encompassing image of acceptance.'[86] 'Tarras', like 'Tam o' the Wilds', is symptomatic of a development in MacDiarmid's writing towards integration and comprehension – the aim for 'planetary consciousness' combined with attentive local knowledge which culminated, for MacDiarmid, in sequences such as the following, from 'Direadh',

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[84] Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City*. p.271
[85] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'The Land'. p.84
[86] W.N. Herbert. *To Circumjack MacDiarmid*. p.114

encapsulating the textures and tangles of a hillside ecosystem in defence of 'our multiform, our infinite Scotland':

> Sitting there and resting and gazing round
> Sees not only the heather but blaeberries
> With bright green leaves and leaves already turned scarlet,
> Hiding ripe blue berries; and amongst the sage-green leaves
> Of the bog-myrtle the golden flowers of the tormentil shining;
> And on the small bare places, where the little Blackface sheep
> Found grazing, milkworts blue as summer skies;
> And down in neglected peat-hags, not worked
> Within living memory, sphagnum moss in pastel shades
> Of yellow, green, and pink; sundew and butterwort
> Waiting with wide-open sticky leaves for their tiny winged prey;
> And nodding harebells vying in their colour
> With the blue butterflies that poise themselves delicately upon them,
> And stunted rowan with harsh dry leaves of glorious colour.[87]

This section bears some resemblances to Darwin's description of the 'entangled bank', the famous passage in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) which evokes the biodiversity of a section of vegetation:

> It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.[88]

Like the 'Direadh' sequences, it is likely that 'Tarras' was influenced by Maciarmid's reading of Sorley MacLean's Gaelic poetry, most notably

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[87] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Direadh I'. *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. pp.1170-1171.
[88] Charles Darwin. *On the Origin of Species*. London: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998; 1859. p.368

'The Cuillin', which features an 'alien bogland' ('a' bhoglaich choimhich') representative of Western capitalism and the bourgeoisie, unlike MacDiarmid's 'Bolshevik bog'.[89] MacDiarmid's 'mother of usk and adder' is particularised, radical, and distanced from both culture and agriculture. The eroticised landscape, too, seems to be suggested by MacLean's poem, which finds feminised forms in the mountain itself:

> ri uchdaich nam fireach àrda
> 'nan creagan uamharra bàrcadh
> mar chìochan-màthar am t'saoghail
> stòite 's an cruinne-cé ri gaoladh.
>
> the heaving chest of the high mountain bluffs
> surging in proud crags
> like the mother-breasts of the world
> erect with the universe's concupiscence.[90]

However, MacDiarmid's excitement in 'Tarras' appears to stem more from the landscape's indifferent fecundity and half-animated *smeddum* than a sense of 'acceptance'.

> Ah, woman-fondlin'! What is that to this?
> Saft hair to birssy heather, warm kiss
> To cauld black waters' suction
> Nae ardent breists' erection
> But the stark hills![91]

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[89] See Sorley Maclean / Somhairle MacGill-Eain. 'The Cuillin / An Cuilthionn'. *O Choille gu Bearradh / From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems in Gaelic and in English translation.* Manchester & Edinburgh: Carcanet/Birlinn, 1999; 1989. pp.64-131.
[90] *Ibid.* p.79
[91] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Tarras'. *Complete Poems.* Vol. I. pp.337-339; p.338

Although MacDiarmid finds distorted versions of female anatomy in this landscape, the gender of the bog-land is ambiguous, the speaker seeing at times his own bodily likenesses in the tangle of heather and moss, where 'laithsome parodies appear | O' my body's secrets in this oorie growth'. MacDiarmid's view sees all the diverse interrelations of the bog-land, barren for human purposes but necessary for the unknown 'purpose o' life'. Amazed at the fruitfulness of the 'stark hills', he chants a litany of the bog's complexities:

> On cods o' crammasy sundew
> Or wi' antrin sprigs o' butterwort blue,
> Here in a punk-hole, there in a burn,
> She gecks to storm and shine in turn,
> Trysts wi' this wind and neist wi' that,
> Now wi' thunder and syne wi' snaw,
> Bare to the banes or wi' birds in her hat,
> -- And has bairns by them a'. . .[92]

This earth-mother is fiercely independent – perhaps the reasoning behind the puzzling subtitle of the second section, 'Why I Became a Scots Nationalist'. MacDiarmid's representation of bog corresponds to Seamus Heaney's evocation of bog lands in *North* (1975), which, he suggests, 'can be regarded as informational retrieval systems for their own history: the bog bank is a memory bank'.[93]

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[92] *Ibid.* p.338

[93] Seamus Heaney, in *Don't Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their Own Words.* Ed. Clare Brown and Don Paterson. London: Picador, 2003. p.101

Such animistic representations of the 'earth mother' have their parallels in the work of North East regional novelists such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Neil Gunn and Nan Shepherd. The land, in *A Scots Quair*, is neither male or female, although the paralleling in *Sunset Song* between the developing sexuality of Chris Guthrie and the processes of 'Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seed-time' and 'Harvest' – the titles of four of the five sections comprising *Sunset Song* – would seem to allude to the old idea of the agricultural land as feminised. Indeed, the figures which most frequently mediate the relationship between human communities and the land in Gibbon's work tend to be strong-minded women, like Chris in *A Scots Quair*, or Margaret Menzies in the short story, 'Smeddum'. Whilst the women's relationship with the land is an intimate one, the men's experience of the land can lead to obsession and the destruction of human relationships, as with John Guthrie, Chris's father, in *Sunset Song*, and Rob Galt in 'Clay'.

As Raymond Williams has pointed out, D.H. Lawrence evokes an erotic agricultural landscape in *The Rainbow*, suggesting that, in some ways, 'it is the sexual imagery of the earth and of working the land which runs from Meredith through the regional novelists'. Lawrence writes in *The Rainbow* that:

> They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels. . .Their life and inter-relations were such: feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to the furrow for the grain and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire.[94]

'More particularly,' Williams suggests, 'it is male sexual imagery', which in some ways divides women from this sexualised longing for the land. This is true to a certain extent in Gibbon's writing: in the short story, 'Clay', the female protagonist finds relief in turning away from the land as something 'finished and ended, a thing put by', no longer bound to it by her man's obsession with cultivation.[95] The earth itself lusts for the farmer, and is not satisfied until it has reclaimed him as its (her) own: 'and the earth turns sleeping, unquieted no longer, her hungry bairns in her hungry breast where sleep and death and the earth were one'.[96] Muir, too, recognised the ties of the agricultural landscape in *Scottish Journey*, noting that 'fertility is as close a shackle as dearth, fettering the peasant not merely by necessity, but by all his senses, until his mind becomes as dull and rich as the landscape on which it feeds.'[97]

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[94] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, cited in Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1971). p.265

[95] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'Clay', *Scottish Scene*, pp.268-279; repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*. Ed. Valentina Bold. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2001. pp.69-81; p.81

[96] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'Clay.' p.81.

[97] Edwin Muir. *Scottish Journey*. p.64

MacDiarmid's animistic, defiant peatbog is further paralleled by figures such as dark Mhairi, a survivor of the Highland Clearances, in Neil Gunn's *Butcher's Broom*, in which she is pictured as 'the human mother carrying on her ancient solitary business with the earth... in easy accord, the common sensible and so full of natural understanding that silence might extend into external silent, for wind and sun to play upon'.[98] Such ubiquitous gender stereotypes, which were criticised in feminist cultural studies such as Mary Ellmann's 1965 critique, *Thinking About Women*, have been transformed into more positive, powerful representations of women and nature by writers such as Kathleen Jamie, who value the playful suggestion of such fundamental, physical interconnections between an animistic earth and strong female personalities. One might think of the defiantly feminine *genius loci* in 'Bairns of Suzie: a hex' in *The Queen of Sheba* (1994), or the description in *Jizzen* (1999) of the face-down burial of a Gaelic woman poet, 'Meadowsweet', where the woman is imagined to be resurrected, full 'of dirt, and spit, and poetry'.[99]

An earlier incarnation of this bond of strength between women and the landscape is to be found in Sorley MacLean's praise for the poetess of the nineteenth-century Highland Land League, Mary MacDonald, and in the

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[98] Neil Gunn. *Butcher's Broom*. Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1934. p.426
[99] Kathleen Jamie. *Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead: Poems 1980-1994*. Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2002. p.126; Kathleen Jamie. *Jizzen*. London: Picador, 1999. p.49

writings of Nan Shepherd, the Grampian novelist and hillwalker.[100] Nan Shepherd's strong women range from city-working mountaineers to elderly crofters in remote places. In her 1946 review of *Mountain Holidays* by Janet Adam Smith, Shepherd admires the resilience and adaptability of 'the girl who can walk out of a London office, spend a long night in a train, and then walk home through the Cairngorms from Spey to Dee'.[101] Similarly, in an apparently unpublished essay on 'The Old Wives' of the Grampians, she speaks of old country women who 'last longer than the men. Or better', who 'rise before the light, make fires, milk cows...drag firewood from the hill, stew tea and drink it - black as peat, strong as their own sinewy selves'.[102] Shepherd describes one in particular, Betsy, as 'hoarse, and black. Her nails are encrusted with earth... [her] harsh voice exalts you like a dram'.[103] Roderick Watson has called attention to Shepherd's treatment of matter and transcendence in her regional fiction,[104] and it is true that novels such as *The Weatherhouse* feature startling imagery of correspondence between individuals, often women, and the natural world:

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[100] See Sorley MacLean, 'Màiri Mhór nan Oran'. *Ris a' Bhruthaich: Criticism and Prose Writings*. Ed. William Gillies. Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985. pp.250-257.
[101] Nan Shepherd. 'Review of *Mountain Holidays* by Janet Adam Smith'. Nan Shepherd Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.27443.
[102] Nan Shepherd. 'The Old Wives'. (n.d.) Nan Shepherd Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.27443. f.40
[103] Nan Shepherd. 'The Old Wives'. (n.d.) Nan Shepherd Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS.27443. f.40
[104] See Roderick Watson, ' "To Know Being": Substance and Spirit in the Work of Nan Shepherd', *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Ed. Douglas Gifford & Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

> She had a feeling as though some huge elemental mass were towering over her, rock and earth, earthen smelling. Miss Barbara's tweeds had been sodden so long with the rains and matted with the dusts of her land, that they too seemed elemental. Her face was tufted with coarse black hairs, her naked hands that clutched the fabric of Lindsay's dress were hard, ingrained with black from wet wood and earth. "She's not like a person, she's like a thing," Lindsay thought.'[105]

The animism present in the works of these North-Eastern novelists is striking, and in some ways it inverts the notion of the 'pathetic fallacy', finding human emotions originating in the natural environment rather than layering Romantic meanings or correspondences onto the landscape. Significantly, such viewpoints see the land as an active participant in human acitivites, rather than a passive commodity -- and offer criticism when the primitive sense of connection is eroded by economic or political factors, as in *Sunset Song*. Gibbon's writing evokes the closely-felt correspondences between human biological processes and emotions and the earth. In *Sunset Song*, the land itself influences the actions and emotions of humans, whose lives are shown to be as closely interwoven with the cycle of natural rhythms as the animals and plants around them. John Guthrie's lust which emerges in the late summer with 'the harvest in his blood',[106] and Chris's desire for Rob after completing the harvest,

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[105] Nan Shepherd. *The Weatherhouse*, in *The Grampian Quartet*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2001; 1930. p.27

[106] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. *Sunset Song*, in *A Scots Quair*. London: Penguin Books, 1986; 1932. p.89

which 'came on her silently, secretly, out of the earth itself' demonstrate this connection.[107] Chris's body is 'as fine and natural and comely as a cow or a rose'; a part of nature, and not privileged above these other elements of the natural world.[108] This sense is most acutely felt during Chris's pregnancy:

> Only night was the time to be feared, if she woke and there was that stillness; but even the quietest night if she listened hard she'd hear the wisp-wisp of the beech leaves near to the window, quietening her, comforting her, she never knew why, as though the sap that swelled in branch and twig were one with the blood that swelled the new life below her navel. . .[109]

The concern with language and environment is perhaps most fully explored in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*. In his essay, 'Literary Lights' written for *Scottish Scene*, Gibbon reviews the effectiveness of his own experiment in representation, noting that his 'scene so far has been a comparatively uncrowded and simple one – the countryside and village of modern Scotland. Whether his technique is adequate to compass and express the life of an industrialised Scots town in all its complexity is yet to be demonstrated'. [110]

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[107] *Ibid.* p.175
[108] *Ibid.* p.141
[109] *Ibid.* p.143
[110] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'Literary Lights'. *Scottish Scene*, pp.194-289; repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*. pp. 123-137; p. 135

Language and outlook are linked from the very beginning of the trilogy, as the protagonist, Chris Guthrie, finds herself in *Sunset Song* divided in two, with 'two Chrisses... that fought for her heart and tormented her':

> You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, you'd almost cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies.[111]

The divide between cultivation of the mind and cultivation of the land is extended to a divide within the psyche itself, organised along the divisions of language. The 'Scots words' speak of the connection with the land and its people, 'the toil of their days and unendingly their fight', in opposition to English vocabulary, 'sharp and clean' words which 'slid smooth from your throat' but which ultimately seem to be meaningless, dislocated from the land and its life. Language is hence seen to be inseparable from the human relationship with the land, whether this be one of closeness, typified here by Scots words, or distance, the 'modern' English. This ecological sense, however, is under threat. The traditional ways of 'dwelling' on the land are shown in *Sunset Song* to be slipping away; the small crofters are displaced or killed by the machinations of the First World War, 'the madness beyond the hills' whose approach heralds

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[111] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. *Sunset Song. A Scots Quair.* p. 37

the dissolution of the old ways of life. The War's effects are shown to be disastrous throughout the 'ecosystem' of Kinraddie; an old farmer goes mad; the woodland is cleared from the hills; the arable smallholdings are taken over for sheep grazing:

> And faith! The land looked unco woe with all its woods gone, even in the thin-sun-glimmer there came a cold shiver up over the parks of the Knapp and Blawearie folk said that the land had gone cold and wet right up to the very Mains.[112]

The land itself shivers with the cold, bare to the elements now that the woods are gone. The road leading from the land towards the terror of the Great War is an emblem of the technology which threatens the old ways of life, an 'ill road that flung its evil white ribbon down the dusk'.[113] Local, bioregional concerns are superseded by the demands of national and international politics, and the economic aspirations of big business – the global machinations of capitalism. Thus the cynical and exploitative 'greed of place and possession and great estate' overrides the peasant-farmer's local, more ecologically-minded wish for 'the kindness of friends and the warmth of toil and the peace of rest':

> we are told that great machines come soon to till the land, and the great herds come to feed on it, the crofter has gone, the man with the house and the steading of his own and the land closer to his heart than the flesh of his body.[114]

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[112] *Ibid.* p.191
[113] *Ibid.* p.176
[114] *Ibid.* p. 193

This sense of connection with the land is deeply engrained, pre-lingual, subconscious, and eminently physical; the young ploughmen, who will be superseded by the 'great machines', are conscious of 'something that vexed and tore at them, it belonged to times they had no knowing of'.[115] The collective memory of the land with 'the sweat of two thousand years in it' is transmitted to its inhabitants, an 'admission of dwelling' which endures despite the 'enframing' tactics of modern technology - ideas which would be important in the post-war work of Edwin Muir and later writers such as George Mackay Brown, considered in Chapter 4. Thus *Sunset Song* can be read ecologically as an attempt to draw the reader into the experience of dwelling in a network of humans and nature:

> Informed by an ecologist's sense of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living systems and the process of constant adaptation in individual environments, bioregional writers picture specific localities as complex, multilayered palimpsests of geology, meterology, history, myth, etytmology, family genealogy, agricultural practice, storytelling, and regional folkways.[116]

The slipping away of the old ways of life through the remainder of the trilogy, the madness of the Great War replaced by other madnesses associated with modernity, is viewed with compassion and unflinching realism. Each stage of the trilogy, from the croft at Blawearie, the Segget

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[115] *Ibid.* p. 194

[116] Michael Kowalewski. 'Bioregional Perspectives in American Literature.' *Regionalism Reconsidered.* Ed. David Jordan. New York: Garland Publishing, 1994. p.41

manse, and the boarding house in Duncairn, demonstrates how regional life is profoundly affected by trans-national concerns. Just as shadow of the First World War is cast over *Sunset Song*, *Cloud Howe* analyses the aftermath of that war, the unemployment, social deprivation, and crisis of faith which faced many on their return, with Robert Colquohoun as much a victim of war as Ewan Tavendale. *Grey Granite*'s depiction of communist movements and civil discontent in the Scottish city suggests an ever more global outlook, with the young Ewan's experience of police brutality transforming him into a suffering 'Everyman'.

The universal nature of human suffering had been explored in Gibbon's 1933 novel, *Spartacus*, where the figure of Christ and Spartacus's slave revolt are drawn into parallel. Hugh MacDiarmid's early lyric, 'The Innumerable Christ', explores a similar sense of cosmic humanity, the Earth appears as a distant twinkling star, a message of despair as much as of hope, foretelling the birth of countless 'fateful bairnies' who will grow up to become 'endless Christs'. *Grey Granite*, dedicated to Hugh MacDiarmid, seeks but does not find the elemental qualities of human existence, unless this consists of ceaseless change whilst only the earth endures. It is possible to see this novel as a counterpart to MacDiarmid's geological poetry;. the names of the sub-sections, drawn from geological terminologies, are the sort of glinting, abstract vocabulary MacDiarmid

employs in 'On a Raised Beach', where he too insists on the solid realities of the earth, the contemplation of stones a meditation which allows the first glimmerings of consciousness of the human condition.

> Perhaps this is the real land; not those furrows that haunt me as animate. This is the land, unstirred and greatly untouched by men, unknowing ploughing or crops or the coming of the scythe. Yet even those hills were not always thus. The Archaic Civilisation came here and terraced great sections of those hills. . .They are so tenuous and yet so real, those folk - and how they haunted me years ago![117]

Scottish Scene; A Scots Quair; Scottish Journey: the titles of these works seem to invoke an obsession with nation and national identity, maps, politics and boundary lines rather than ecologically-friendly regional thinking. But if one considers the methodology, rather than the terminology, employed by these writers, it is possible to gain an entirely different perspective - one which allows for local environments and global contexts perhaps more than for the politics and polemics of nationalism. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, who could be as much of a polemicist as MacDiarmid, wrote with particular vitriol against Nationalism in general and 'Small Nations' in particular, foreseeing the future where petty questions of nation and national allegiance would be transcended by a sense of global unity:

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[117] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'The Land'. *Scottish Scene*; repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*. pp. 90-91

> Glasgow's salvation, Scotland's salvation, the world's salvation, lies in neither nationalism nor internationalism, those twin halves of an idiot whole. It lies in ultimate cosmopolitanism, the earth the City of God, the Brahmaputra and Easter Island as free and familiar to the man from Govan as the Molendinar and Bute. . . .A time will come when nationalism, with other cultural aberrations, will have passed from the human spirit, when Man, again free and unchained, has all the earth for his footstool, sings his epics in a language moulded from the best on earth, draws his heroes, his sunrises, his valleys and his mountains from all the crinkles of our lovely planet.[118]

The local and the cosmopolitan are given priority here; interconnections and communities emphasised over boundaries and divisions. MacDiarmid understood nationalism and internationalism to be interdependent, and through his contact with Patrick Geddes and his participation in 'provincial' Modernism, saw that the regional and the global were attuned with one another. Although he professes to be searching for adequate ways of representing Scotland, or of facilitating the possibility of Scotland's self-representation, MacDiarmid's early poetry consistently bears the mark of local and global outlooks, and is only implicitly nationalist, through its linguistic idiom and its association with the prose polemics and theorisings MacDiarmid published elsewhere. In MacDiarmid's early Scots lyrics, as in Gibbon's novels, local and global viewpoints are both acknowledged as vital, and fused in such

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[118] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'Glasgow.' *Scottish Scene;* repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology.* pp.97-109; p.108.

a way that the merely 'national' is transcended. This is, in essence, the Scottish 'take' on the globe: ecological lyricism which fuses universal and local geographies, universal and local human experience. In this way, it was the land under their feet, and by extension, the earth itself, that was important for 'regional' novelists like Lewis Grassic Gibbon or Nan Shepherd, a concern which is also reflected in Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry, and something which would become even more crucial for MacDiarmid's mature work, and the writings of his contemporaries in the post-war, post-atomic world, discussed in Chapter 4. It is thus emphatically local and global concerns, rather than 'national' ones *per se*, which become the key to understanding the work of inter-war Scottish writers, and of many who follow them.

Chapter 4:
Belonging and Displacement

> Scottish literature is being held back... [by] a desperate unwillingness to move out into the world with which every child now at school is becoming familiar – the world of television and sputniks, automation and LPs, electronic music and multi-storey flats, rebuilt city centres and new towns, coffee bars and bookable cinemas, air travel and transistor radios ... although writers can struggle on for a time on language, on myth, on nature, on 'eternal emotions' there comes a day of reckoning when they realise that they are not speaking the same terms as their audience. [1]

> We are no longer innocent, we are no longer just parishioners of the local... Yet those primary laws of our nature are still operative. We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our histories. [2]

In the 1960s, Edwin Morgan was concerned that modern Scottish literature was reluctant to tackle the realities of contemporary experience, the world of technology which had become the *status quo* in Scotland, as it had in other Western societies. In an essay on Edwin Muir's poetry, Morgan was disappointed in Muir's rejection of modernity, and his vision of 'returning all post-atomic mankind to an Orkney farm' in the famous cold war poem, 'The Horses'.[3] Muir's 'hope' lies in 'a post-devastational return to primitive pastoral life [which] might restore man to the protection of the earth he had

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[1] Edwin Morgan. 'The Beatnik in the Kailyard'. *Essays*. Cheshire: Carcanet New Press, 1974. pp.174-5; first published in *New Saltire* 3, Spring 1962.
[2] Seamus Heaney. 'The Sense of Place'. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978*. London: Faber, 1980. pp.148-9
[3] Edwin Morgan. 'Edwin Muir', *Essays*. p.193; first published in *The Review*, 5 February 1963.

become increasingly estranged from'.[4] Morgan's 'hope', by contrast, lies in the technological future, a litany of man-made objects. As Morgan saw it in 1962, the categories of 'language... myth... nature... "eternal emotions"' were becoming defunct, part of an enervated tradition of Romantic escapism which had no place in the modern world of 'air travel and transistor radios'. Certainly, Morgan has a valid point here: while in the 1930s Edwin Muir noted the disintegrative effects on local identities of 'innovations [such] as the movies and the wireless',[5] as late as 1966 George Mackay Brown objected to 'washing machines, cars, TV, telephones everywhere' in the Orkney Islands.[6] Morgan, by contrast, is exhilarated by change; linguistic experimentation, the potential of technology, and the questions raised by discoveries or transformations are the driving forces behind his own poetry. 'Good luck to Seamus Heaney,' Morgan says, 'but I pushed out, and continue to push out, a different boat... a nuclear-powered icebreaker...a ship of space out there up there riding the solar wind.'[7]

The implication of all this, that certain 'regional' or 'rural' perspectives are out of step with modern life, is partly why a group of Scottish writers that

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[4] *Ibid.* p.192
[5] Edwin Muir. *Scottish Journey*. Edinburgh & London: Mainstream Publishing, 1999; 1935. p.24
[6] Letter from George Mackay Brown to Willa Muir, 18th April 1966. Willa Muir Papers, National Library of Scotland. Acc.10557/4.
[7] Edwin Morgan. 'Roof of Fireflies' (1990), *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*. Ed. W.N. Herbert & Matthew Hollis. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2000. p.192

includes Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown has been shunned by recent conceptualisations of Scottish literature, in favour of writing which deals with modern 'reality', mainly the experience of the industrial city. One may indeed wonder whether it is possible for a writer to deal in mythic narratives focusing on a traditional rural heritage, while staying alert to modern environmental and cultural realities. It seems all too easy for critics to dismiss modern Scottish writing about rural environments or the natural world as 'pseudo-pastoral',[8] as 'evasion and escape',[9] and for certain writers to be marginalised or ignored as a consequence. Douglas Dunn has voiced the predicament of the would-be 'quasi-mystical nature poet', for whom 'Romantic Sleep' exists in eternal tension with 'Social Responsibility'.[10] However, writing about nature need not always be a guilt-ridden occupation. If it is important for literature to acknowledge the diverse experience of post-war modernity, surely it is equally important for it to tackle the dissociations and environmental problems generated by modernity, namely technology, urbanism and globalisation.

The 1960s witnessed a 'world of television and sputniks', but it was also the decade in which the environmental movement took off, alongside civil rights

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[8] Andrew Noble. 'Urban Silence: Scottish Writing and the Nineteenth-Century City.' *Perspectives of the Scottish City*. Ed. George Gordon. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985. p.79

[9] Edwin Morgan. 'Edwin Muir'. *Essays*. p.192

[10] Douglas Dunn, quoted in Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1998. p.65

and women's liberation. The eco-historian, Donald Worster, suggests that the modern 'age of ecology' began with the explosion of the atomic bomb in 1945, and that the 'new moral consciousness' of environmentalism was confirmed in the 1960s, with the first glimpses of the earth from outer space.[11] The twentieth-century experience of war and technological destruction galvanised the environmental debate, highlighting the importance of questions about 'place' and 'home', about belonging and displacement – questions which are still being asked today by writers like John Burnside or ecocritics such as Jonathan Bate. Post-war life promised a starry future but it also threatened crisis, even disaster, the possibility of atomic war and widespread environmental devastation. Not only that, it questioned some of the foundational premises of modernity itself:

> The bomb cast doubt on the entire project of the domination of nature that had been at the heart of modern history. It raised doubts about the moral legitimacy of science, about the tumultuous pace of technology, and about the Enlightenment dream of replacing religious faith with human rationality as the basis of material welfare and virtue.[12]

It could well be said that Scottish writers, both before and after the war, were in the process of exploring those very doubts; scientific knowledge was being contemplated by writers as diverse as Nan Shepherd, Hugh MacDiarmid

[11] Donald Worster. *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas.* 2nd Edn. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994; 1977. pp.342-387
[12] *Ibid.* p.343

and Edwin Morgan, while the tension between faith and technology found voice in the work of Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown. In response to this new consciousness, scientists began to debate the environmental predicament with a new sense of urgency. From the American publication of Fairfield Osborn's book, *Our Plundered Planet* and William Vogt's *Road to Survival* in 1948, to Rachel Carson's groundbreaking work of popular ecology, *Silent Spring* in 1964, ecological issues were for the first time reaching the forefront of the public consciousness in America and Britain at least.[13] The first ecology textbook, Eugene and Harold Odum's *Fundamentals of Ecology*, appeared in 1953, while throughout the 1960s a series of environmental laws were passed in both the UK and the USA.[14] Political activism by American environmental organisations such as the Sierra Club over the conservation of wilderness areas culminated in the celebration of 'Earth Day' in 1970[15] – an event which drew on grass-roots student support.[16]

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[13] Fairfield Osborn, *Our Plundered Planet*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1948; William Vogt, *Road to Survival: On the Problem of Man's Destruction of the Earth's Surface and Its Products*, New York: W. Sloane Associates, 1948; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, London: Penguin, 2000; 1964.

[14] Harold Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders & Co., 1953. American legislation during the 1960s and 70s included: 1964 Wilderness Act; 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, 1973 Endangered Species Act. UK legislation included: 1966 Clean Air Act; 1974 Control of Pollution Act.

[15] 'Earth Day' was billed as a 'national day of observance of environmental problems', organised by the US Senator G. Nelson. Twenty million people took part in the first Earth Day, making it the largest organised demonstration in history. See G. Nelson, 'All About Earth Day', *The Wilderness Society Website*. http://earthday.wilderness.org/history. [accessed 10th June 2004]

[16] 'Rising concern about the environmental crisis is sweeping the nation's campuses with an intensity that may be on its way to eclipsing student discontent over the war in Vietnam...' Gladwin Hill, *The New York Times*, November 30, 1969, quoted in G. Nelson, 'All About Earth Day', *The Wilderness Society Website*. http://earthday.wilderness.org/history. [accessed 10th June 2004]

So, rather than being out of step with the main issues of the twentieth century, one might argue that Muir's poetic search for 'the protection of the earth',[17] and Mackay Brown's later preoccupations with the intrusion of technology in the Orkney Islands are indeed in line with the perspectives of modern ecological theorists and critics, who are also exploring 'modern Western man's alienation from nature' and its possible antidote, 'the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth that is our home'.[18] The recent inclusion of Muir's 'The Horses', the poem which Morgan thought of as a post-atomic pastoral, in *Wild Reckoning*, an anthology of 'eco-friendly' poetry which marks the fortieth anniversary of *Silent Spring*, demonstrates the potential value of such unfashionable writing.[19] Thus, in an age of environmental awareness, it is a profound mistake to ignore the ecological perspectives employed by supposedly 'peripheral' post-war writers like Muir or Mackay Brown. It is also wrong to forever shore up the categories of Scottish 'urban' and 'rural' writing as if they are qualitatively, as well as thematically, distinct – even an urban poet like Edwin Morgan explores nature, place and homeland alongside technology and modernity. Instead, ecological perspectives need to be recognised as central, rather than peripheral, to modern Scottish writing; that, as Heaney suggests, being

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[17] Edwin Morgan. 'Edwin Muir'. *Essays*. p.192
[18] Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2001. p.ix
[19] John Burnside and Maurice O'Riordan (Eds.) *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring'*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004.

'dwellers' and 'namers' in search of home and history is both compatible with and important for global consciousness and modern life.

While Morgan was disappointed in Muir for his failure to meet 'the wonderful challenge which the apparent menace of the scientific and political future has thrown down to us mid-century', Muir certainly believed that this menace existed, and his prose work, which includes the Glasgow novel *Poor Tom* (1932) and the travelogue, *Scottish Journey* (1935), attempted to document the first rumblings of that threat, even if his later poetry did not always offer a viable solution. Morgan's outlook on Muir becomes more intriguing if one considers Muir's view of Walter Scott in the 1936 polemical study of Scottish culture, *Scott and Scotland*. Muir's analysis criticises Scott for retreating into the past, mythologising Scotland's history instead of interrogating Scotland's present. Muir suggests that 'Scott can find a real image of Scotland only in the past, and knows that the nation which should have formed both his theme and his living environment as a writer is irremediably melting away around him'.[20] One could equally apply this argument to Muir's own work; but here, the difficulty in finding a 'real image' of home is not only a specific cultural one, but a problem endemic to the modern world as a whole.

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[20] Edwin Muir. *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*. Edinburgh: Polygon Book, 1982.p.87

Robert Crawford has suggested that, contrary to received opinion, much twentieth-century poetry is characterised by the 'celebration of home territory and non-metropolitan values'[21] and that there is a need to reassess 'the hierarchy of taste which subtly downgrades the poetry of home as "regionalist"'.[22] Certainly, questions of home and exile have received some important critical attention in recent years, particularly in the remodelling of critical perspectives on modern Irish literature, and in the work of post-colonial theorists and cultural geographers.[23] Exile, as the ideology, as well as the reality, of the 'displaced person', has a well-established provenance in the writings of post-war thinkers such as Edward Said or Theodor Adorno. While exile can seem far more alluring than being at home, it also involves sensations of loss and estrangement. As Edward Said argues in his important essay, 'Reflections on Exile', exile 'is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience', since it is 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'.[24] Said goes on to suggest that it is possible to view 'the modern period itself as spiritually

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[21] Robert Crawford. *Identifying Poets: self and territory in twentieth-century poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. p.175
[22] *Ibid.* p.175
[23] For an overview of recent geographical and sociological perspectives, see Shelly Mallet. 'Understanding home: a critical review of the literature'. *The Sociological Review* (2004) 62-89.
[24] Edward Said. 'Reflections on Exile'. *Reflections on Exile: and other literary and cultural essays*. London: Granta, 2001. p.173

orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement'.[25] Heidegger, a figure who is now widely acknowledged to be significant in the history of ecological thought, viewed the human predicament in terms of 'ontological homelessness, meaning that we have no abiding home, since we are not embedded in the world as a part of nature',[26] and that, in the twentieth century, 'Spellbound and pulled onward by all this [technology], humanity is, as it were, in a process of emigration':

> [Humanity] is emigrating from what is homely [*Heimisch*] to what is unhomely [*Unheimisch*]. There is a danger that what was once called home [*Heimat*] will dissolve and disappear. The power of the unhomely seems to have so overpowered humanity that it can no longer pit itself against it.[27]

One might point out here that this migration to the 'unhomely' was nowhere more evident than in the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi party, of which Heidegger was a member in the 1930s. However, such questions of home and exile are certainly relevant to the foundational premise of ecological criticism, that ways need to be found to circumvent our fundamental alienation from nature, to somehow reconnect us with the earth. In this way, ecological theory links up with both post-colonial anxieties and the discourses of phenomenological philosophy, linking lost Edens with

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[25] *Ibid.* p.173
[26] George Pattison. *The Later Heidegger.* London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p.9
[27] Martin Heidegger, from *Gesamtausgabe* (1978). Quoted by George Pattison in *The Later Heidegger,* p.60.

displaced humans.[28] Like 'exile', 'belonging' has become something of a loaded term in considerations of post-war culture, with its associations of home, community, and the dual possibility of inclusion or exclusion.[29] Such concepts had to be radically reassessed in the aftermath of the two world wars, with the knowledge of what 'blood and soil' ideologies of home and homeland could mean – a central concern for the poet Edwin Muir, among others. The continuing relevance of these questions has been demonstrated more recently, by the use of 'belonging' to denote the idea of ecological 'dwelling' in Jonathan Bate's work, [30] or to express John Burnside's view that there is a need for communal inclusiveness in the face of political patriotism, re-enfranchising 'the non-belongers, the flag-less'.[31] The sense of 'belonging' is thus an important part of 'being in the world'.

Belonging is also the title of Willa Muir's memoir, published in 1968. Although essentially a book about marriage, *Belonging* opens with a lengthy consideration of the importance of place in the early lives of both Muirs. For Willa Muir, who had been born in the Shetlands but moved with her family

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[28] Articles which explore the links between postcolonial theory and ecological criticism include Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, 'Ecological Postcolonialism in African Women's Literature', *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*. Ed. Patrick D. Murphy. Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998. 344-349; Susie O'Brien, 'Articulating a World of Difference: Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism and Globalization.' *Canadian Literature* 170/171 (2001): 140-161.

[29] See Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

[30] *Ibid.* p.ix

[31] John Burnside. 'Standards of Belief'. *The Guardian*, Saturday January 25, 2003.

to Montrose as a young child, 'belonging' in the everyday sense was organised along the lines of language. She notes that her 'first words were in the Norse dialect of Shetland, which was not valid outside our front door', which led to a fundamental sense that she 'did not feel that [she] belonged whole-heartedly to Montrose'. As discussed in Chapter 3, such questions about language and identity had been explored in the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, whose representation of the dilemma between homely 'Scots words to tell to your heart', rooted in the land and its people, and foreign, dislocated 'cool and clean' English vocabulary, is part of a wider debate within 1930s Scottish culture about language, folk-memory and cultural identity – a debate which was made explicit by the publication of Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland* (1936).[32] However, in Willa Muir's memoir, this sense of cultural displacement is compensated for by a more universal sense of 'belonging':

> The 'feeling' came upon me like a tide floating me out and up into the wide greening sky – into the Universe, I told myself. That was the secret name I gave it: Belonging to the Universe. Like Thoreau, I found myself 'grandly related'.[33]

Muir is referring to Thoreau's *Journal*, in which he records that, 'alone in the distant woods or fields... I come to myself, I once more feel myself grandly

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[32] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. *A Scots Quair*. London: Penguin Books, p.37
[33] Willa Muir. *Belonging: a memoir*. London: Hogarth Press, 1968. p.14

related, and that cold and solitude are friends of mine'.[34] This is a solitary sort of belonging, which has affinities both with nineteenth-century American transcendentalism and the 'sublime' of European Romanticism. However, Willa Muir's concept of 'belonging' is not simply a Romantic reflex. A psychology graduate, as well as Modernist intellectual in the fullest sense (demonstrated by the Muirs' masterful translations of Franz Kafka and Hermann Broch, among others), Willa Muir was no naive theorist. Her use of the term 'belonging' is qualified by her awareness of geographical, cultural and psychological estrangement. When she describes Edwin Muir as a 'displaced person', she not only indicates his exile from the Orkney Islands, but is all too aware that the term applies to real refugees, real people driven from their homelands by the machinery of war, and that it is linked to a wider concept of psychological alienation which Muir experienced throughout his life.

Edwin Muir is one of those unfashionable figures whom critics find difficult to deal with; Sheila Hearn suggests that Muir's poetry has presented 'a closed, exclusive world in which all his critics have been imprisoned'.[35] Other critics have suggested that Muir's outlook is characterised by a

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[34] Henry David Thoreau. '7th January 1857'. *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*. Ed. B. Torrey and F. H. Allen. 14 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906.
[35] Sheila Hearn, in *Books in Scotland* (1980). Cited in George Marshall. *In a Distant Isle: The Orkney Background of Edwin Muir*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987. p.2

'continuing preoccupation with...the great myths of human existence'[36] while his poems are 'on the whole neutral in form and language' - all of which might suggest that Edwin Morgan's judgement was correct.[37] As Margery McCulloch observes, 'His European affinities were with German Romantic and post-Romantic poetry as opposed to the French Symbolist poetry which excited the interest of Eliot and MacDiarmid'.[38] However, the heritage of German Romanticism certainly has its bearing on the history of ecological thought, not least in the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, so it is worthwhile taking another look at Muir's work from a new, ecological angle.

Muir was born and brought up on an Orkney farm, where increasing rents forced his father off the land, with the family eventually settling in the industrial west of Scotland. Moving from a life which was 'an order, a good order', 'made up of legend, folk-song and the poetry and prose of the Bible... [and] customs which sanctioned...instinctive feelings for the earth', Muir and his family found themselves in the 'chaos' of the industrial city, where 'My father and mother and two of my brothers died... within two years of one

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[36] James Aitchison. *The Golden Harvester: the vision of Edwin Muir*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988. p.3
[37] Margery McCulloch. *Edwin Muir: Poet, Critic and Novelist*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. p.ix
[38] *Ibid.* p.ix

another...That is a measure of the violence of the change'.[39] Muir's transition from rural Orkney to industrial Glasgow has been well-documented, not least in his own autobiographical writings, but the unique way he frames the experience, in terms of both geographical and temporal dislocation, is worth reproducing here:

> I was born before the Industrial Revolution, and am now about two hundred years old... in 1751 I set out from Orkney for Glasgow. When I arrived I found that it was 1901, and that a hundred and fifty years had been burned up in my two days' journey. ...All my life I have been trying to overhaul that invisible leeway.[40]

The key factor here is the Industrial Revolution – a central problem which was also confronted in the work of the English Romantics. However, this telling passage reveals how technological 'progress' is, for Muir, central to modern exile, a condition of crisis which he struggled to understand at first through Nietszchean individualism and later, by a combination of Christian myth and Jungian psychoanalysis. Edwin Morgan, reviewing Willa Muir's *Belonging*, rationalised the Muirs' perpetual rootlessness as a symptom of the modern condition: 'They were transients in an age of transients, displaced persons in an age of technically 'displaced persons', and much of the sense of wholeness in the poetry is owed to this fact'.[41] Such personal and ideological transience, as many studies of Muir's work have noted, contrasts with the

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[39] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography*. Ed. Peter Butter. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000. p.54
[40] Edwin Muir. Diary entry, Summer 1939. *An Autobiography*. p.289
[41] Edwin Morgan. 'On A Slow River: Review of Willa Muir's *Belonging*'. *Times Literary Supplement*. Issue 3452, 25th April 1968, p.412.

'timeless', 'eternal' properties of Muir's childhood Orkney, as represented in the poetry. As a recent critic of Muir, George Marshall, suggests, Muir's experience of twentieth-century eviction and exile is aligned with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century clearances of the Highlands and Islands.[42] The titles of his collections – *Journeys and Places* (1937), *The Narrow Place* (1943), *The Voyage* (1946), *The Labyrinth* (1949) and finally, *One Foot in Eden* (1956) – above all emphasise place and movement. Indeed, Muir's own life was itself a series of moves from one place to another, as the chapter titles in his first autobiography, *The Story and the Fable* (1940), demonstrate, tracking his progress from the remote Orcadian island of Wyre through to Glasgow, London, Prague and Rome. Marshall is right to emphasise the importance of physical place to Muir's poetry, as well as its universal or mythical aspects – this in line with Iain Crichton Smith who insists that 'To be an islander is to inhabit a real space on a real earth'.[43] However, Marshall is misleading when he asserts that Muir 'brought a singular innocence' to his experience of European cities. The terrible knowledge of the 'displaced person' continually haunts Muir; his inter-war experiences of refugees, homelessness, and division are deliberately juxtaposed, in his poetry, with conceptual ideals of Eden, of pastoral nature, primordial farmers, and of childhood homes.

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[42] George Marshall. *In a Distant Isle: the Orkney Background of Edwin Muir*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987.
[43] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Real People in a Real Place'. *Towards the Human: Selected Essays*. Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1986. p.17

Muir's retrospective view of Orkney as some sort of idyll of 'the good life' free from the problems of modern society is of course deceptive, and indeed, elsewhere he acknowledges it to be false. Certainly, Muir is conscious of his Orcadian mythologising, noting in 'The Myth', 'My childhood all a myth | Enacted on a distant isle'.[44] But the abstraction of the pastoral ideal appeals to Muir's imagination, and the Orkney landscape is co-opted to form the visionary landscape of his poetry, which also feeds on the folk and ballad traditions of the Orkney Islands and rural Scotland. Even these, Muir laments, are dissolving. 'Complaint of the Dying Peasantry' asserts that 'Our old songs are lost, | Our sons are newspapermen | At the singers' cost'.[45] There are important values of harmony with the natural world in the traditions of the 'old songs', which Willa Muir wrote about in *Living With Ballads* (1965):

> Men, animals, birds, trees and rivers appear to be all on the same footing, all intensely alive and aware of each other, all belonging to the same world in a common flow of feeling. There seems to be little or no turning back to reflective self-consciousness, as if the tides of human feeling ran out unchecked to fill the whole visible universe.[46]

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[44] Edwin Muir. 'The Myth'. *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir: An Annotated Edition*. Ed. Peter Butter. Aberdeen: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991. p.141; originally published in *The Voyage* (1946).
[45] Edwin Muir. 'Complaint of the Dying Peasantry'. *The Complete Poems*. pp.243-4.
[46] Willa Muir. *Living with Ballads*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1965. p.53

Newspapers, mass-produced and mass-distributed, do seem distanced from the localised folk-world of traditional culture. Heidegger objected to modern mass media for its propagation of 'the one-sided view', a 'univocity of concepts...[which] has the same essential origins [as] the precision of the technological process'.[47] As discussed in Chapter 3, this attitude can be related to Leavis and Thompson's idea of the disintegration of the 'organic community' which Muir picked up on in his travelogue, *Scottish Journey* (1935). A distaste for newspapers, and their implied disruption of folk culture, is something which Muir's protégé, George Mackay Brown theorised in *An Orkney Tapestry*:

> A community like Orkney dare not cut itself off from its roots and sources. Places like Rackwick and Eynhallow have no meaning if you try to describe or evaluate them in terms of a newspaper article.[48]

Brown also complains about people's opinions 'regurgitate[d]' from 'some discussion they heard on TV the night before, or read in the *Daily Express*', and says that 'The old stories have vanished with the horses and the tinkers', the 'surrealist folk [who] walked our roads and streets, Dickensian figures with earth and salt in them'.[49] One might argue that journalism is as much about telling stories as the Ballads or the Sagas are, but it is the linguistic and

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[47] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, quoted in G. Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, p.58

[48] George Mackay Brown. Letter to Willa Muir, 6 May 1965. Willa Muir Papers, National Library of Scotland. Acc.10557/4

[49] George Mackay Brown. *An Orkney Tapestry*. London: Quartet Books, 1974; 1969. p.21

cultural simplification of the newspaper report, combined with the 'outsider' stance of the journalist which Muir and Mackay Brown object to. Hugh MacDiarmid, a journalist, might have contended that such writing is not 'at the singers' cost', having managed to combine the two occupations successfully (and incestuously, by virtue of his multiple pseudonyms) for a number of years. But Muir, and later Brown, would prefer that Orkney was not polluted by such signs of modern depersonalisation – anything from a tractor to a newspaper can represent, for them, a breach in the ancient harmony of rural life. Mackay Brown, a lifelong inhabitant of the islands whose writing is very much from the intimate interior of the Orkney community, may arguably be entitled to his idiosyncratic views on such modern 'intrusions'; despite complaining about transistor radios and television, Mackay Brown owned a radio and his books were adapted for television with his blessing. Muir's retrospective views of Orkney are perhaps more problematic.

Having left the islands for a life in the city, Muir and his family had inevitably become outsiders, exiles from their homeland, and divided from the reality of rural experience by urban life. Although Muir's early works attempt to recapture the seeing eye of the folk in poetry such as the ballads in *First Poems* (1925), his later verse, with its classical influences and accompanying transformation of Orkney into some sort of 'universal

landscape', gave up any pretensions to writing about rural life from within. While recent developments in Muir criticism have foregrounded the importance of physical place and 'mundane reality' rather than the universal, abstract aspect of Muir's work, Muir's distance from Orkney often means that his poetry is left with emblematic, abstracted representations of the countryside and its workers.[50] This simplification is essentially pastoral in nature, and allows Muir to exploit the symbolic potential of farming and nature without dealing with the day to day realities of that environment. What this amounts to is a mythologising of Orkney, and rural Scotland by implication, in Muir's poetry, contrasted with the harder edge of realism in his prose writings about the city in work such as the Glasgow novel based on the death of his brother, *Poor Tom*. This perceived division between the 'real life' of the city and the 'simple life' of the countryside was later to be criticised by another displaced islander, Iain Crichton Smith, in his essay, 'Real People in a Real Place'.[51]

Muir does, however, attempt to analyse his real reactions to the Orkney environment in his autobiographical work. Childhood sensations of 'harmony' or 'completeness', opposed to 'contradiction', are explored in *An Autobiography*, with the child's 'original vision of the world' posited as:

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[50] For example, see George Marshall, *In a distant isle: the Orkney background of Edwin Muir*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987.
[51] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Real People in a Real Place'. *Towards the Human: Selected Essays*. Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1986.

> a state in which the earth, the houses on the earth, and the life of every human being are related to the sky overarching them; as if the sky fitted the earth. Certain dreams convince me that a child has this vision, in which there is a completer harmony of all things with each other than he will ever know again.[52]

This vision of interrelatedness is an ecological one, and bears resemblances to Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological view of the world as house or refuge which the etymology of the word 'ecology' (house study) presupposes.[53] A similar image recurs in 'Scotland 1941', in which Muir offers us a vision of rural harmony, an eternal 'rustic day' 'roofed in' by a 'simple sky'.[54] While this harmonious feeling might suggest a proto-ecological consciousness, and seems to recall Willa Muir's 'belonging to the Universe', Edwin Muir's portrayal of childhood experience is deeply problematic. In his autobiographical writings, such reminiscences about his childhood portray, not contentment, as might be expected, but a deep sense of alienation. Following a spell of ill health, he experienced 'a passion of fear and guilt', which resulted in a sense of alienation from the people and the landscape around him, a world where every object was touched with fear... a sort of parallel world divided by an endless, unbreakable sheet of glass from the

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[52] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography*. p. 25

[53] Bachelard speaks of 'an image of the immense sky resting on the immense earth' as a bird protects the eggs in its nest. See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994; Trans. 1964; 1958. p.104

[54] Edwin Muir. 'Scotland, 1941'. *The Complete Poems*. p.100

actual world'.[55] It is, for Muir, as if sensations of displacement are fundamental to human experience, whether one lives on a farm or in a slum, suggesting that 'There comes a moment (the moment at which childhood passes into boyhood or girlhood) when this image [of harmony] is broken and contradiction enters life'.[56] While this idea contains overtones of Wordsworthian Romanticism, the idea of the 'broken image' is of course one which T.S. Eliot, a major influence on Muir's writing, employed in *The Waste Land*, which asks 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow | Out of this stony rubbish?' with no answer but 'A heap of broken images, where the sun beats | And the dead tree gives no shelter'.[57] Muir connects Romanticism with Modernism, and demonstrates that, in questions of home and belonging at least, they have similar preoccupations. As noted previously, 'Modernism' tends to be viewed as a guilty, anthropocentric malady in the eyes of the ecocritic.[58] However, it is important to realise that Modernism asks questions about 'being-in-the-world' which are interesting for ecological theory. Eliot's poem makes use of the archetypal visionary landscape, the desert, to symbolise what he senses as the intrinsic alienation of modern life. In this context, Muir's status as a 'displaced person' is not

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[55] Muir, *An Autobiography*. p. 25
[56] Edwin Muir. *The Story and the Fable: an autobiography*. London: George G. Harrap, 1940. p.36
[57] T.S. Eliot. 'The Waste Land'. (1925) *Selected Poems*. London: Faber & Faber, 1961.
[58] See Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*. p.234

unique, and his melancholic sense of division and fragmentation is perhaps typical of the twentieth-century writer, as Theodor Adorno suggests.[59]

The violence of the division is confirmed, for Muir, by his experiences of wartime Europe and the aftermath of that devastation. In 'The Good Town', an echo of an earlier poem, 'The Town Betrayed', the poem's speaker guides an imagined visitor around a town devastated, it appears, by war.

> These mounds of rubble,
> And shattered piers, half-windows, broken arches
> ...These gaping bridges
> Once spanned the quiet river which you see
> Beyond that patch of raw and angry earth
> Where the new concrete houses sit and stare.[60]

It seems appropriate to compare this poem with a passage by Rilke which Heidegger quoted in *The Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology*, in which a ruined wall of a demolished house suggests the 'stubborn life' of the home which once existed there, and invites the reader to discover the truth of dwelling and homelessness which the description evokes.[61] 'The Good Town' also bears some resemblances to Wordsworth's 'The Ruined Cottage', in which a picturesque ruin reveals its sad history of a rural family destroyed

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[59] Theodor Adorno speaks of the impossibility of dwelling in his autobiography *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Mutilated Life*, cited by Edward Said in 'Reflections on Exile'. p.564
[60] Edwin Muir. 'The Good Town'. *Collected Poems*. pp.173-6.
[61] From Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, quoted by David Halliburton in *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1981. pp.12-13.

by war.[62] However, Muir's approach to the subject does not indulge in pleasurable Romantic melancholy. While Muir is no 'Modernist' in the strictest sense of the word, he is more than just a latent Romantic, or as Hugh MacDiarmid suggested, a practitioner of 'a sort of Emersonian transcendentalism'.[63] Where Wordsworth sketches an overgrown garden as an image of 'desolation', Muir presents us with a 'patch of raw and angry earth', where homes once used to be. The once-quiet landscape is now literally scarred by war, the demolished buildings representative of wider societal fragmentation, whilst the replacement 'concrete houses' offer no possibility of authentic 'dwelling'. Although some of the original homes still survive, 'what once | Lived there and drew a strength from memory' has gone. The disruption of traditional culture, and of the strength of folk memory, serves to differentiate 'home' from 'house', with the former inhabitants either 'scattered' or 'as strangers'.[64] Troubled by the 'comfortless smell of casual habitation', Muir's poetry circles around the possibilities of 'dwelling' in our fallen state:

> Can we build a house here, make friends with the mangled stumps
> And splintered stones, not looking too closely
> At one another?[65]

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[62] William Wordsworth. 'The Ruined Cottage'. *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Nicholas Roe. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
[63] Hugh MacDiarmid, September 1948. *The Raucle Tongue*, Vol. III. p.128
[64] Edwin Muir. 'The Good Town'. *Complete Poems*. pp. 173-6.
[65] Edwin Muir. 'Variations on a Time Theme'. *The Collected Poems*. pp.49-62.

This waste land sounds very much like some parts of Eliot's famous poem. But where Eliot despairs, Muir, perhaps surprisingly, asks about the possibility of house-building. Picking up the pieces, finding some way back to an authentic interrelationship between individuals, communities and the land on which they depend, is Muir's main project in his post-war poetry. Muir's early reading of Nietszche certainly contributed to his feelings of disconnection and displacement – as Edward Said says, 'Nietszche taught us to feel uncomfortable with tradition'.[66] But in some ways the antidote to such deracination was Jung, whose theories of archetypes and the 'collective unconscious' reopened the possibilities of tradition, of folk memory and the fusion of landscape and history, to the modern world. Jung's theory of archetypes as 'the archaic heritage of humanity' which are 'embedded' in our 'inherited organic system'[67] was an influence on a number of novelists and poets of the twentieth century, notably Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Neil Gunn, as Douglas Gifford has demonstrated.[68] With this in mind, building a home is not only about finding a way to 'dwell' in Heidegger's sense of the term, but is also about trying to rebuild the fragmented self since, in Jungian theory, the house is an image of the psyche. The Muirs were both interested in psychology, and Edwin Muir underwent Jungian psychotherapy while

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[66] Edward Said. 'Reflections on Exile'. *Reflections on Exile*. p.173

[67] C.G. Jung, quoted in Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. *Ibid.* pp.47-51

[68] See Douglas Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1983.

living in London.[69] It seems likely that such Jungian ideas reactivated Muir's faith in his Orkney heritage, since a striking characteristic of Muir's work is that, despite his keen awareness of alienation and dissociation, his emphasis remains on community and inclusiveness. Even the title of his most Nietzschean work, *We Moderns* (1918), speaks of this ambivalence, as do poems like 'Scotland, 1941', which begins 'We were a tribe, a family, a people'.[70] Muir's poetry is a lament for the loss of community, using his Orcadian heritage of farming and fishing as images of a lost way of life, but by the use of these inclusive pronouns – 'we', 'our' – the poems suggest that some sort of community still exists, even if this is merely a community of outcasts. This is all part of Muir's endeavour to find out 'where we came from, where we are going, and, since we are not alone, but members of a countless family, how we should live with one another'[71] – one might add to that, 'how we should be in the world', for this is the essential question of 'belonging' which Muir explores throughout his work. Writing after the Second World War, Muir recognises its impact on the way humans view their place in the world, linking 'community' with 'nature' and 'co-operation', opposed to war with its 'disunity' and 'machinery':

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[69] The psychotherapy sessions resulted in a series of waking visions which form the basis for some of the symbolic motifs in Muir's poetry. See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, pp.150-164.

[70] Edward Moore [Edwin Muir]. *We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1918; Edwin Muir. 'Scotland, 1941'. *Collected Poems*. p.100

[71] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography*. p.56

> our concern has ceased to be the community or country we live in, and has become the single, disunited world: a vast abstraction, and at the same time a dilemma which, as it seems, we must all solve together or on which we must all be impaled together. This world was set going when we began to make nature serve us, hoping that we should eventually reach a stage where we would not have to adapt ourselves at all: machinery would save the trouble. We did not foresee that the machinery would grow into a great impersonal power, that we should have to serve it instead of co-operating with nature as our fathers did...[72]

The 'great impersonal power' of machinery, in contrast to traditional human-nature co-operation, is a prominent theme in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who, like other phenomenological philosophers in the tradition of Husserl, sought to break down the Cartesian division between self and other. Machinery, as 'equipment', 'frames its material as ready for use, and thus reduces the material to its usefulness or serviceability', whereas traditional ways of relating to the natural world, which have more in common with art than with technology, in which the world 'is not "used up" or reduced to "usefulness" but is re-presented in a new aspect'.[73] What makes Muir interesting from an ecological point of view is that he adapts his Orcadian environmental consciousness to generalise about the plight of modern humanity – a process which other Scottish islanders also enact in their writing. Iain Crichton Smith, reflecting on his collection of poetry, *The Village*, says that his community and its local, natural environment is 'a

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[72] *Ibid.* p.189
[73] George Pattison. *The Later Heidegger.* p.53

central concern for me, but beyond it there are echoes of war, injustices, violence, evil'.[74] The rural village, for Smith, is 'a home from which I can explore, and expatiate on that larger contemporary world'.[75] Such concerns set Scottish rural writing within a wider, international framework, bringing writing about geographically and culturally 'peripheral' areas into a global forum.

In Muir's work, 'community', no longer taken for granted, becomes the focus for a conceptual 'belonging' or 'dwelling-place', underpinned by collective memory. Behind the modern experience of displacement lie the Jungian archetypes of Adam and Eve, transformed in Muir's poetry into simple farmers – perhaps his own mother and father, whom he later reflects on as 'saints' for their 'goodness, their gentleness, their submission to their simple lot'.[76] The title of the first version of his autobiography, *The Story and the Fable*, refers to his notion of the 'story' of an individual life and its context within the wider mythic narrative of human experience – an idea, no doubt, influenced by Jung's theories of the 'collective unconscious'.[77] In 'The Sufficient Place', Muir shows us the image of human life interwoven with 'leaf and bird and leaf', an idyll of home:

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[74] Iain Crichton Smith, in *Don't Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their Own Words*. Ed. Clare Brown & Don Paterson. London: Picador, 2003. pp.271-272; p.271
[75] *Ibid.* p.272.
[76] Edwin Muir. Diary entry of 15 May 1958, Appendix II, *An Autobiography*. p.293
[77] See C.G. Jung. *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Trans. R.F.C.Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968.

> Within the doorway stand
> Two figures, Man and Woman, simple and clear
> As a child's first images
> . . .
> This is the Pattern, these the Archetypes,
> Sufficient, strong, and peaceful. All outside
> From end to end of the world is tumult. Yet
> These roads do not turn in here but writhe on
> Round the wild earth forever.[78]

As with Lewis Grassic Gibbon's striking image of the road that leads to war in *Sunset Song*, which 'flung its evil white ribbon down in the dust', the roads in Muir's poem also symbolise technology and the restlessness of modern life – a contrast with the symbolic potential of roads in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson or Walt Whitman.[79] World wars and international politics had darkened the potential of such images; their association with the machinery of a frightening modernity makes them appear as part of what Heidegger called an 'enframing' ideology, a utilitarian intrusion into the landscape rather than the natural expression of human community and interconnection which Stevenson wrote about.[80] The outer world of confusion and striving for progress, echoing the 'chaos' of Glasgow which Muir had previously dwelt upon, is figured against the chance to 'make a summer silence | Amid

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[78] Edwin Muir. 'The Sufficient Place'. *The Collected Poems*. p.91
[79] Lewis Grassic Gibbon. *Sunset Song*. London: Penguin Books, 1986. p.176
[80] As discussed in Chapter 2. See Robert Louis Stevenson 'Roads.' *Essays of Travel*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1916.

the tumult' based on this archetype of the 'still home, the house and the leaves and birds'.[81]

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Muir's reliance on emblems and images is the appearance of both visionary and realistic animals in his poetry and writings. Animals are of course an intrinsic part of farming life, and their frequent appearances in *The Story and the Fable* reflect this. However, these animals as well as the mutated creatures of heraldry, or the fabulous beasts of legend, are also presented as aspects of the human psyche. Muir's poetic representations of animals are both a continuation of the tradition of the mediaeval bestiary, in which animals represent certain cultural or moral concepts, and an assimilation of the psychological symbolism of animal forms, suggested by the practice of psychoanalysis. Willa and Edwin Muir would have been familiar with similar alienating transformations in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.[82] The man who awakes to find himself transformed into a giant insect is perhaps not so far from Muir himself, whose dreams and waking visions feature terrifying distortions of both his own body and of animal bodies. But this modern horror is also based on ancient guilt, the contradiction of dissociation and dependence.

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[81] Edwin Muir, 'The Sufficient Place', *Complete Poems*. p.91.
[82] Franz Kafka. 'Metamorphosis'. *Short Stories*. Ed. J.M.S. Pasley. London: Oxford University Press, 1963. The Muirs translated much of Kafka's fiction in the 1930s.

> Two hundred years ago the majority of people lived close to the animals by whose labour or flesh they existed. The fact that we live on these animals remains; but the personal relation is gone, and with it the very ideas of necessity and guilt. The animals we eat are killed by thousands in slaughter-houses which we never see.[83]

Such a dissociation between modern society and the animals and agriculture on which it depends was taken up by Martin Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology*, which contrasts the activity of the traditional farmer, who 'places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase' and modern agriculture, which he calls 'the mechanised food industry'.[84] The dual position of human dependence on animals, represented by either sacrifice or slaughter, is a theme which recurs in the regional novels of Neil Gunn and Naomi Mitchison in war-time years, and later, in the 1960s, in the work of writers as disparate as George Mackay Brown and Archie Hind. Muir, in trying to circumvent the division between humans and nature which he feels is at the root of modern alienation, argues that:

> at the heart of human civilization is the byre, the barn, and the midden. When my father led out the bull to serve a cow brought by one of our neighbours it was a ritual act of the tradition in which we have lived for thousands of years, possessing the obviousness of a long dream from which there is no awaking. When a neighbour came to stick the pig it was a ceremony as objective as the rising and setting of the sun; and though the thought never entered his mind that without that act civilization, with its fabric of customs and ideas and faiths, could not exist – the church, the school, the council chamber, the drawing-room, the library, the city – he did it as a thing that had

[83] Edwin Muir. *The Story and the Fable*. p.53
[84] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', cited in George Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, p.54

> always been done, and done in a certain way. There was a necessity in the copulation and the killing which took away the sin, or at least, by the ritual act, transformed it into a sad, sanctioned duty.[85]

Strikingly, Muir is arguing for the centrality of what modern civilisation tends to view as peripheral. The farm is the symbolic, and the actual, centre of human civilisation. This reflects early twentieth-century anthropological theory, which stressed the importance of agriculture as a foundation of civilisation, but Muir claims that even in the modern world of the city, of 'televisions and sputniks' as Morgan puts it, our fundamental relationship with natural environments is crucial.[86] It is this 'connexion between men and animals' which Muir recognises as intrinsic to his childhood experience of rural Orkney and, more generally, the possibility of 'belonging' on the earth. His contemplation of the ancient interconnections between human and animal life implies the awareness of what might be called an 'ecological' relationship of interdependence, in contrast to the predominantly economical value attached to farm animals in modern day society. Muir himself never uses the word 'ecology' (unlike MacDiarmid) but he explores ideas which have recognisably ecological connotations, using terms such as 'harmony', 'co-operation with nature' and 'organic community'.[87] Interestingly,

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[85] Edwin Muir. *The Story and the Fable*. p.39

[86] For example, the Diffusionist theories which influenced both Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Edwin Muir. See Edwin Muir, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon'. *Uncollected Criticism*. pp.251-253

[87] The term 'ecology' appears fairly frequently in MacDiarmid's prose writings. See, for example, *The Company I've Kept*, London: Hutchinson, 1966, p.81, or 'Tom Robertson and

MacDiarmid echoes Muir on this theme in *Lucky Poet* (1943), suggesting that there has been 'a wholesale alienation and reduction of mankind to familiarity only with their own "miserable matter", as if it were a second and far more drastic and irrevocable expulsion from the Garden of Eden'.[88] Muir is also aware of the erosion of the 'personal relation' between humans and the natural world, and often expresses this in terms similar to MacDiarmid's - although, significantly, without MacDiarmid's irony. Muir's avowed 'passion for animals' springs from his rural upbringing, but is, he fears, no longer shared by society as a whole, whose disconnection from the animals on which they depend has become acute. The rituals of agriculture confer dignity on what would otherwise provoke revulsion or guilt - an ambivalence which Muir experiences in his own equivocal position as a farm-born cultural commentator. Modern life's intrinsic guilt of dissociation calls for some kind of cleansing sacrifice:

> to make us realize the inescapable guilt on which our life is based every one should be compelled to kill an animal on some set day, to flay it, disembowel it, and cut it up, publicly and under the supervision of a skilled priest.[89]

This idea of the ritualised 'rite of passage' which acknowledges our dependence on, as well as our guilt towards, the natural world is also

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"Human Ecology"', *The Raucle Tongue*. Vol. III. Ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1996-1998; 1948. pp.168-171.

[88] Hugh MacDiarmid, from *Lucky Poet*. London: Methuen, 1943. Cited in Douglas Dunn, *Scotland: An Anthology*. London: Harper Collins, 1991. p.83

[89] Edwin Muir. *The Story and the Fable*. p. 53

present in the novels of Neil Gunn; in the symbolic killing of the butterfly, 'God's fool', by the young Finn in *The Silver Darlings*,[90] or the triumphant struggle with the salmon which memorably opens *Highland River*.[91] However, despite this essential dependence, one senses that in Muir's essentially Christian imagination, animals are and should be closed off from the human world - perhaps this is also why they resurface so disturbingly in his dreams. Muir acknowledges that he has 'suppressed the animal in myself'.[92] His ambivalence towards animals can be tracked down to the struggle between his intellectual engagement with Nietzsche in Glasgow and his contradictory belief in the 'immortal soul'. Having convinced himself of the truth of Nietzsche's suggestion to live in the 'here and now', Muir suffered a horrifying vision of the implications of this philosophy:

> I looked round me at the other people in the tramcar; I was conscious that something had fallen from them and from me; and with a sense of desolation I saw that they were all animals... I realized that in all Glasgow, in all Scotland, in all the world, there was nothing but millions of such creatures living an animal life and moving towards an animal death as towards a great slaughter-house.[93]

Muir sees the animal world as a 'great impersonal order, without pathos in its suffering' - a view which he feels would be unbearable in its application

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[90] Neil Gunn. *The Silver Darlings*. London: Faber & Faber, 1989; 1941. p.100
[91] Neil Gunn. *Highland River*. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1991; 1937. pp.5-9
[92] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography*. p.47
[93] *Ibid*. p.42

to human life.[94] The glimpse into the world of the animals is enough for Muir, 'the small, sensual, momentary world of a beast'.[95] Self-knowledge, for Muir, comes with a forgetfulness of the body, and in his poetry, animal life proceeds in its own idyll, trapped forever on the fifth day of creation, as Muir writes in 'The Days'.[96] Inspired by Nietzsche's observation, made in *The Uses and Abuses of History*, that 'the animal lives unhistorically', 'The Animals' (1952) reflects Muir's assimilation of Genesis and Nietzsche.[97]

> They do not live in the world,
> Are not in time and space,
> From birth to death hurled
> No word do they have, not one
> To plant a foot upon,
> Were never in any place.[98]

Muir's distrust of technology is not, as might be expected, ameliorated by a comforting sentimentalisation of traditional rural life. Instead, his writings often bear witness to an alienating view of both domesticated and wild animals, which often appear dangerous or mysterious, suggesting the un-knowableness of a wider 'Nature'. On seeing the plough horses as a child, Muir was 'infused by a longing to go up to them and touch them and simultaneously checked by the knowledge that their hoofs were dangerous: a

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[94] *Ibid.* p.43
[95] *Ibid.* p.44
[96] See Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography.* p.45 and 'The Days'. *Complete Poems.* pp.194-5
[97] Friedrich Nietszche. 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.' *Untimely Meditations.* Trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Ed.Daniel Breazeale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p.61
[98] Edwin Muir. 'The Animals'. *Collected Poems.* p.193

combination of emotions which added up to worship in the Old Testament sense'.[99] This naïve 'worship' is further evidence of Muir's ambivalent attitude, also characterised by disgust for the animal within the human, as well as respect for the animals on which humans depend. Pastoral conventions normally dictate that within the idyll everything works in harmony – the shepherd in tune with his flock. But even in Muir's 'enchanted isle' there remains the crack in the hearthstone, the division at the heart of human life which shatters the pastoral image.

With all this in mind, it is interesting to compare 'Horses' (1925) with 'The Horses' (1956), poems written at the beginning and the end of his poetic career. The first impression of the 'lumbering horses in the steady plough' might seem the perfect subject matter for a comforting pastoral, but we quickly discover that Muir finds them 'terrible, so wild and strange', transformed, in his mingled terror and fascination, into 'mute ecstatic monsters', similar to the distorted heraldic forms of his dreams. Their 'hooves like pistons' seems a strange image, a fusion of the technological and the organic which transforms the rural scene into some sort of other sinister reality, a hallucinatory 'dread country crystalline', where the organic elements of the rural scene were 'bright and fearful presences' for the young

[99] Edwin Muir. *The Story and the Fable.* p.22

boy.[100] This is reminiscent of the 'morbid gift of seeing'[101] which George Douglas Brown expressed in *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) – a novel which Muir admired – in which the protagonist finds only alienating 'lurid flashes' in his experience of farm life and the natural world.[102] The horses in this poem can only serve to heighten the onlooker's sense of alienation, the animals representative of the danger and the unknowableness of the natural world. The horses of the 1956 poem, by contrast, appear as equivocal emblems not only of the distance of 'Fallen man' from Eden, but also of the possible reconciliation of humans and nature. A sort of post-apocalyptic version of Genesis, 'The Horses' documents the redemptive return of the 'strange horses' to the farms following 'the seven days war that put the world to sleep':

> On the second day
> The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.
> On the third day a warship passed us, heading north,
> Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day
> A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter
> Nothing. The radios dumb.[103]

Technology and death are once again allied, presumably in reference to an atomic war, but here the annihilating machinery has been rejected. This

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[100] Edwin Muir. 'Horses'. *Collected Poems*. pp.5-6
[101] George Douglas Brown, cited in Ian Campbell. *Kailyard*. Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1981. p.66
[102] *Ibid*. p.66
[103] Edwin Muir. 'The Horses'. *The Complete Poems*. pp.226-7

modern Genesis is thus a countdown to a simpler future which moves the farmers 'back | Far past our fathers' land.'

> The tractors lie about our fields; at evening
> They look like dank sea-monsters couched and waiting.
> We leave them where they are and let them rust.[104]

The tractors are a sinister reminder of the 'impersonal power' of technology which, as we have seen, Muir views as the source of the inhuman atrocities of the war.[105] Now it is the farm machinery which is 'othered' as 'mute...monsters', in place of the 'strange horses' which, though mysterious and frightening, are also representative of past simplicity.

> We had sold our horses in our fathers' time
> To buy new tractors. Now they were strange to us
> As fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield
> Or illustrations in a book of knights.
> We did not dare go near them.[106]

The modern relationship with animals, which is commonly described only in economic or functional terms – 'creatures to be owned and used' – is contrasted with the realisation of the 'long-lost archaic companionship' of domesticated farm animals such as the horses. In this poem, the lack of familiarity with the animals is the fact which permits the possibility of redemption, or reconciliation, with the ability to recognise the precious value of human dependence on the animal world, the 'free servitude' which Muir

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[104] *Ibid.* p.227
[105] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography.* p.189
[106] Edwin Muir. 'The Horses'. p.227

speaks of. Of course, this is a utopian vision, but it is significant in that it imagines a reconciliation for modern humans with both the natural world and ancient tradition, mediated by an acceptance of and a respect for animal life – a vision which might ameliorate 'our blood-guiltiness towards the animals'.[107]

As discussed in Chapter 3, Edwin Muir was not the only Scottish writer to imagine a primitive reconnection with the earth in response to war or technological destruction – Lewis Grassic Gibbon explored similar themes in his science fiction novels, *Gay Hunter* and *Three Go Back*. But Gibbon's utopian vision extends both before and beyond agriculture, with a society of golden-skinned hunters as part his Diffusionist viewpoints on the evils of civilisation.[108] Muir, who was attracted to Diffusionism for its appeal to the Christian mythology of the Fall, is thus perhaps something of a Cold War Jungian pastoralist, which might seem a strange concept, but then, the term 'pastoral' had already been elasticated in the Modernist period, for example in William Empson's book, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935). The idea of ancient companionship with animals suggested in 'The Horses', together with the suggestion that the young horses are somehow newly created, suggests the possibility of a human 'return' to the Golden Age, a way of

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[107] Edwin Muir. *An Autobiography*. p.45

[108] See Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Three Go Back*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2000; 1932, and *Gay Hunter*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989; 1934.

seeking intimacy with the natural world through the rebirth of an authentic 'organic community':

> ...some half-a-dozen colts
> Dropped in some wilderness of the broken world,
> Yet new as if they had come from their own Eden.
> Since then they have pulled our ploughs and borne our loads
> But that free servitude still can pierce our hearts.
> Our life is changed; their coming our beginning.[109]

Such utopian visions of reaching back into a more innocent, authentic existence are shared by Muir's contemporary, the novelist Neil Gunn, in novels such as *Highland River*, in which the protagonist's development from boyhood to adulthood is paralleled with a quest for the 'source' of his local river, as both physical environment and symbol of ancestral continuity. In its exploration of Jungian 'collective memories', as suggested in Chapter 3, Gunn's writing shares some similar motivations to Muir's poetry. Like Muir, Gunn's work includes representations of animal life as mediators in the relationship between the human individual and the environment, however, here it is the physical, phenomenological aspect of the animals which is most important, stressing the kinship of the boy and the animal life he finds so fascinating:

> The snug warmth of the hollow in the bed where he lay all curled up would sometimes induce a feeling of extraordinary glee, so that he would breathe under the blankets and laugh wide-mouthed and

[109] Edwin Muir. 'The Horses'. p.227

> huskily. Hah-haa! he would chuckle, gathering all his body into a ball and touching his knees with his chin. Hah-hah-haa! softly, so that no one would hear... It was great fun to be so safe in this warm hole, while the dark, cold river rolled on its way to the distant thunder of the sea... All things with warm life in them were curled up, like himself and heard, waking or in sleep, the rushing of the river.[110]

This imaginative identification and delight with the sleeping animals recalls John Muir's talk of the 'divine radium' of all creatures, which must have 'lots of fun in them'[111] – the essential joy of all living things, a concept which would later become important to Gunn in his study of Zen philosophy. Kenn's vivid imagination allows him to pass 'from beast to beast... understanding best, however, those that were curled up in a den', a sense of gleeful 'intimacy' which induces him to 'smell the thick warmth out of his own pelt'.[112] This physical pleasure of refuge, imaginatively sympathising with the experience of the animals in their dens, is the 'primal image' of refuge the phenomenological philosopher Gaston Bachelard relates to human inhabitation:

> Physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed. If we were to look among the wealth of our vocabulary for verbs that express the dynamics of retreat, we should find images based on animal movements of withdrawal, movements that are engraved in our muscles [...] what a quantity of animal beings are there in the being of man! [113]

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[110] Neil Gunn. *Highland River*. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1996; 1937. p.71
[111] John Muir. 'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth.' *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books*. Ed. Terry Gifford. London: Diadem Books, 1995 p.81
[112] Neil Gunn. *Highland River*. pp.71-2
[113] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p.91

These novelists are most often analysed in terms of their 'Scottishness' or as 'regional' novelists in the limited, and often implicitly derogatory, sense. However, Scottish critics should have the courage and range to see that Scottish writers can and need to be seen in the light of perceptions which are not nation-specific. Ecologically-aware criticism is thus a potentially liberating influence on the study of Scottish literature, placing it within a field of enquiry that is of global relevance, not just the relatively narrow questions of national identity which often dominate Scottish cultural studies. Gunn and Shepherd combine their intuitive feelings of being 'at home' in the wild landscape with a phenomenological viewpoint which relies on close, reverent attention to the physical aspects of the world around them. Scientific observation and practical knowledge are, in the work of Shepherd and Gunn, combined with an acute sense of the sacred, and a fundamental respect for the natural environment which is informed not only by Romanticism and Eastern mysticism, but by scientific enquiry itself.

Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* was eventually published in 1977, but, as she reveals in the preface, it was 'written during the latter years of the Second War and those just after'.[114] She goes on to reflect, 'In that disturbed

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[114] Nan Shepherd. 'The Living Mountain', *The Grampian Quartet*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2001; 1977. p.iv

and uncertain world it was my secret place of ease.'[115] Shepherd's book, together with Neil Gunn's novel, *Highland River* (1937) offer as a counterpoint to the depersonalisation of war what might be called a 'phenomenology of wildness'. For Shepherd, the sensation of delighted 'belonging' was focused on the Scottish mountain landscape of the Cairngorms, a 'forbidden country' to her as a child:

> I could not contain myself, I jumped up and down, I laughed and shouted. There was the whole plateau, glittering white, within reach of my fingers, an immaculate vision, sun-struck, lifting against a sky of dazzling blue. I drank and drank. I have not yet done drinking that draught. From that hour I belonged to the Cairngorms...[116]

Gunn's novelistic expression of a physical and joyful engagement with the natural world is rooted in folk memory and culture – a philosophy of belonging which, like Muir's poetry, draws on Jung's idea of the 'collective unconscious'. Gunn's writings, inspired by his own Highland upbringing, are particularly centred on the experience of hunting wild animals, but are contrasted with the alienation of war. Opening with the epic boyhood struggle of the protagonist, Kenn, in catching and killing a huge salmon with his bare hands, the novel's symbolic centre is the 'Highland river' of the title.

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[115] *Ibid.* p.iv
[116] Nan Shepherd. 'The Living Mountain'. pp.83-84

The poetics of wildness thus mediate between the lived experience of natural objects, creatures and places – a mountain, a river, a salmon, a bird – and the imaginative contemplation of this experience.

> there is more in the lust for a mountain top than a perfect physiological adjustment. What more there is lies within the mountain. Something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered. [117]

Kenn's body and imagination are so in tune with the environment of the strath that he is 'unable to know where his own spirit ends and the wood begins'. Much of Gunn's writing about the Highlands is characterised by a physical enjoyment of what he sees as the 'fundamentals' of rural life – hunting and observing wild animals. This physical sympathy is connected in Gunn's work to a strong sense of ancient folk culture and folk laughter, symbolised by artefacts such as the broch.

> For the truth of life to Kenn was that at its core there was a wise pagan laughter. Behind importance and solemnity, it lay in wait. It was cunning and evasive; it was charming and amusing; it was hard as a tree knot; it was perhaps the old serpent myth that his folk had forgotten how to interpret. The serpent that stuck its tail in its mouth to suppress its laughter! The folk – and goodness and kindness and loyalties.[118]

Indeed, it seems that this idea of 'pagan laughter' is also central to Gunn's view of the world, and the natural environment in particular. Folk laughter

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[117] *Ibid.* p.6
[118] Neil Gunn. *Highland River.* p.218

is essential to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of 'carnival ambivalence', the bodily aesthetic of mediaeval folk culture which undercuts the seriousness and hierarchical control of 'officialdom'.[119] This may alert us to an aspect of Gunn, whose contemplation of physical bodies seems to be an attempt to formulate a way of comprehending the physical basis for human attitudes towards the natural world. Kenn's attitudes to wildlife perhaps reflect the Bakhtinian aspect of the 'grotesque':

> The initial picture was always that of coming on the animal asleep, and watching the faint movement in its fur, a fascinating, crawling movement, like the slow ripple he had seen in the warm gut of a disembowelled rabbit.[120]

Certainly, *Highland River*, like Gunn's other novels, makes rich use of Highland folk myths and their implied ancient pagan roots. In such myths, the salmon is imaginatively identified with the serpent, and the landing of the first salmon of the season is supposed to confer 'wisdom' on the fisher. Of course, 'wisdom', in this novel, is figured as 'secret knowledge' a combination of local knowledge and self-discovery, all achieved for Kenn through the physical or imaginative exploration of the river. [121]

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[119] Mikhail Bakhtin, from *Rabelais and His World* (1965) in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. Ed. Pam Morris. London: Arnold Publishers, 1994. pp.227-244.

[120] Neil Gunn. *Highland River* p.72

[121] *Ibid.* p.131

> ...he feels that if the boulders were to become geological rocks, the water a chemical compound, and the salmon a polarised amalgam of tissues reacting to the play of certain stimuli, the adventure in the pool would be given its cosmic application and the mirth would break on an abrupt laugh.[122]

Similarly, in Nan Shepherd's meditation on the mountain she is attempting 'to know its essential nature', and this knowledge does not exclude the possibility of scientific knowledge.

> The more one learns of this intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissues of plant and insect (an intricacy that has its astonishing moments, as when sundew and butterwort eat the insects), the more the mystery deepens. Knowledge does not dispel mystery. [123]

Ways of observing, ways of looking, become more and more important in post-war Scottish writers. These writers are not simply belated Romantics, but are aware of modifying what they see as Romantic impulses in the face of modern politics and technologies. Neil Gunn says in a letter to Nan Shepherd that 'without a certain eye many a scene would be unspeakably bleak and boring' but remarks that in her writing, the reader can find a 'momentary apprehension of the primordial sense of life, alert, quick-eyed'.[124] It seems that an alert sensitivity to the material world is what is most important here, as well as an understanding of the physical senses. Nan

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[122] *Ibid.* p.182
[123] Shepherd, 'The Living Mountain'. p.45
[124] Neil Gunn. Letter to Nan Shepherd, 17 May 1940. *Neil M. Gunn: Selected Letters.* Ed. J.B.Pick. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987. pp.62-3

Shepherd herself muses on this, noting how merely changing the 'focus in the eye, moving the eye itself when looking at things that do not move, deepens one's sense of outer reality'.[125] In this way, she argues, the human can perceive the inanimate in 'the act of becoming' – echoing Gunn's appraisal of her ability to evoke life 'in the movement of transition'. Shepherd, telling of how she is fond of viewing the world upside down and backwards, tells of this:

> In no other way have I seen of my own unaided sight that the earth is round. As I watch, it arches its back, and each layer of the landscape bristles – though bristles is a word of too much commotion for it. Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself.[126]

This search for an altered viewpoint is reminiscent of Dorothy Wordsworth's methods of viewing landscapes, going off the beaten track to view a Highland mountain from a different angle, and in her own writing, eclipsing the Romantic 'I' of Coleridge and William Wordsworth, to offer instead a less egotistical, more unselfconscious view of the natural world. Indeed, Shepherd and Gunn seem to be continually searching for modes of observation and expression which evolve away from the conventional Romantic response to natural environments, into something more meaningful, more 'pure'. Shepherd finds this by meditating on the

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[125] Shepherd, 'The Living Mountain'. p.8
[126] *Ibid.* p.8

phenomenological and ecological aspects of the 'living mountain', while Neil Gunn, it seems, found this potential in the teachings of Zen Buddhism. Shepherd's experience of mountain transcendence is not strictly speaking a Romantic response:

> The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body... It is therefore when the body is keyed to its highest potential and controlled to a profound harmony deepening into something that resembles trance, that I discover most nearly what it is to be. I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life, as is the starry saxifrage or the white-winged ptarmigan.[127]

Whilst this recalls the sensations of joy and health which were sought by the nineteenth-century mountaineers I have discussed in a previous chapter, Shepherd's reactions also emphasise a distinctly modern, ecological perspective on the natural world – a perspective which has correspondences in the work of later 'green' writers such as the environmentalist Rachel Carson or the Beat poet Gary Snyder. Snyder's Zen outlook reflects the similar aesthetics and perspective of this Eastern philosophy with the ideas of interconnection and self-discovery which a theory of 'ecopoetics' reveals. In this sense, Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* and Neil Gunn's writings, even in the early novel, *Highland River*, precede the ecological sensibilities of the likes of Snyder by thirty years or more.

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[127] *Ibid.* p.83

> to come upon the bird in the evening, the solitary bird, almost to its knees in the water, still as a slender tree stump, fishing, its size magnified in the fading light, stops me in my stance, as if I had come upon more than the bird in that quiet place. This is the moment that is never forgotten.[128]

> the real point of the experience is that one comes upon oneself, the 'I', as one may never have done before, almost as though it were outside oneself, in a detachment evoked by the strangeness of the scene and the moment. In this sense it is objective, not subjective.[129]

Such modes of perception lend themselves to a fever pitch of visionary purity which seems to recall Edwin Muir's poetry, and its search for lost innocence:

> here then may be lived a life of the senses so pure, so untouched by any mode of most exquisite awareness, is in itself total experience. This is the innocence we have lost, living in one sense at a time to live all the way through.[130]

Gunn is searching for the possibility of expressing the natural world with the 'ultimate inspired simplicity, economy, of the single brushstroke' which he finds in Zen painting. This Zen-inspired poetics of wildness seeks to avoid the pitfalls of Western expressions, with 'our unending torrents of words, our philosophical systems, our gargantuan Joycean outpourings'.[131] This calm, contemplative mode of perception allows a sense of harmony and

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[128] Neil Gunn. 'The Heron's Legs'. *Landscape and Light: Essays*. Ed. Alistair McCleery. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987. p. 231
[129] Neil Gunn. 'The Flash'. *Landscape and Light*. p.233
[130] Nan Shepherd. 'The Living Mountain'. p.82
[131] Neil Gunn. 'The Flash' p.235

wholeness, with the viewer's eyes made to 'see as they had never seen', and in place of an 'internal subjective mess' there appears an 'external objective scene.'[132] Gunn finds the 'haiku' or 'ideogramme' as the most suitable vehicle for such directness of observation - and indeed, this is the three line form which the Imagists loved for its verbal brevity and visual purity.

Ideals of visual purity were certainly central to the work of other Highland writers. Iain Crichton Smith, for example, writes of the 'visual hardness' of Duncan Ban MacIntyre's Gaelic poetry, his 'fidelity of observation' and his 'knowledge of subject matter'.[133] These are all attributes which Sorley MacLean elaborates on in his essays on 'Realism in Gaelic Poetry' and 'Old Songs and New Poetry'.

> I know the world 'realism' is now chiefly applied to prose literature, and that its special modern connotation is naturalism as manifested in much of the European novel since Zola's time. But there is no necessity to limit the word thus. I see no reason why it cannot yet be applied to poetry to denote the opposite of romance, escapism, fantasy, and their concomitants, affectation, fancifulness, far-fetchedness, and falseness... As its matter, poetry has the life of man or external nature, and thus poetry may embrace all knowledge.[134]

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[132] Neil Gunn. 'Eight Times Up'. *Landscape and Light*. p.240
[133] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Real People in a Real Place'. *Towards the Human: Selected Essays*. Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1986. pp.62-5
[134] Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean. 'On Realism in Gaelic Poetry'. Ris a' Bhruthaich: *Criticism and Prose Writings*. Ed. William Gillies. Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985. p.15

Arguing that Gaelic poetry, in its clear-sighted, observation attitude to the natural world, is 'inconsistent with the pathetic fallacy', MacLean goes on to suggest that this cultural distinctiveness, which manages to avoid the conventions of Romanticism, is a valuable alternative method of viewing landscape and nature. [135]

> *Beinn Dobhrain* makes no pretension to metaphysical content; actually its realisation of dynamic nature makes its essential philosophic value as far superior to Wordsworth's poetry as it is in pure technique.[136]

This distinction between Gaelic and English poetic conventions would be music to the ears of Hugh MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid himself suggests that he had 'dropped the romantic imagination in the thirties', that 'Cartesian dualism had all gone from... [his] later work' in favour of 'materialism'. [137] The arguments put forward by the likes of MacLean and MacDiarmid suggest that Romantic modes of observation and poetics might actually serve to distance the poet or reader from the natural object in view, and that MacDiarmid's call for a 'poetry of facts' or of scientific knowledge, rooted in his philosophy of materialism, might supersede the likes of Wordsworth.

All this fusion of imagist techniques and Gaelic aesthetics certainly appear distanced from the representations of nature in Muir's writings. MacDiarmid

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[135] Sorley MacLean. 'On Realism in Gaelic Poetry'. p.34
[136] *Ibid.* p.34
[137] 'The MacDiarmids – A Conversation: Hugh MacDiarmid and Duncan Glen with Valda Grieve and Arthur Thompson, 25 October 1968'. *The Raucle Tongue.* Vol. III. p. 566

launches a scathing attack on Muir's 'dealings with pseudo-psychological zoology' in a rather belated 1949 review of *The Story and the Fable.*

> There is no shaping imagination at work here, no getting inside animal forms and finding their relationship to men, as in D.H. Lawrence's stories and poems about plumed serpents and tortoises – let alone Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick.* The animals are not alive, but moth-eaten stuffed ones.[138]

It is interesting that MacDiarmid chooses to cite Lawrence as an exemplar of modern nature-writing (although here in the slightly dismissive context of 'plumed serpents and tortoises') because elsewhere he is implicitly critical of Lawrence's method. The poem, 'In Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir', has epigraphs from the ecologist, Frank Fraser Darling, from Principal Shairp and Aldous Huxley.[139] It is clear from the outset that MacDiarmid is using this poem as a sort of propaganda for Gaelic genius – one of his post-war projects, partly inspired, no doubt, by his friendship with the Gaelic poet, Sorley MacLean. This, and another poem, 'Further Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir', were evidently written around or just after the time MacDiarmid had been translating MacIntyre's 'In Praise of Ben Dorain', a lively portrait of a Highland mountain and its wildlife,

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[138] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'On Making Beasts of Ourselves'. *The Raucle Tongue* III. p. 190

[139] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir'. *Complete Poems 1920-1976.* Vol.2. Ed. Michael Grieve & W.R. Aitken. London: Martin, Brian & O'Keefe, 1993. pp.1098-1102.

particularly its deer.[140] 'In Talk...' seeks to contrast representations of animals in the poetry of D.H. Lawrence with those of Bàn MacIntyre's poetry. MacDiarmid quotes Aldous Huxley's assertion that Lawrence 'could get inside the skin of an animal and tell you in the most convincing detail how it felt, and how, dimly, inhumanly, it thought'.[141] In doing so, he sets up a deliberate series of contrasts between the nature observation of the eighteenth-century Gaelic poet, who represents the 'Gaelic genius' which MacDiarmid was hyping-up elsewhere, and Lawrence's much-praised poetry of animals, such as those of *Birds Beasts and Flowers* (1923).[142] MacDiarmid characterises Ban MacIntyre as a sort of Gaelic 'Pan', a pastoral bard whose poetry expresses:

> . . . The speech of one neither man nor animal – or both –
> Yet not monster; a being in whom both races meet
> On friendly ground – all the pleasantness of sylvan life,
> All the genial and happy characteristics of creatures
> That dwell in woods and fields, seeming mingled and kneaded
> Into one substance with the kindred qualities in human nature,
> Trees, grass, flowers, streams, cattle, deer and unsophisticated man.[143]

Probably MacDiarmid was thinking of Lawrence's writings on 'The Great God Pan', in which he emphasises 'the lived relatedness between man and his universe: sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men

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[140] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Further Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir'. *Complete Poems 1920-1976*. Vol.I. Ed. Michael Grieve & W.R. Aitken. London: Martin, Brian & O'Keefe, 1993. pp.632-634; Hugh MacDiarmid.
[141] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk...'. *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. p.1098
[142] D.H. Lawrence. *Birds Beasts and Flowers: Poems*. London: Penguin, 1999; 1923.
[143] MacDiarmid, 'In Talk...' *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. p.1099

everything'. [144] It is also possible, given MacDiarmid's contact with the folklorist F. Marian MacNeill, that this 'sylvan' creature is a peculiarly Gaelic being, the half-man, half-beast Urisk or Uruisg, said to haunt Ben Dorain in Gaelic folklore.

> Like a poet's reminiscence of the time
> When man's affinity with nature was more strict
> And his fellowship with every living thing more intimate and dear,
> Like the Faun of Praxiteles---not supernatural,
> Just on the verge of nature yet within it.
> Nature needed, and still needs, this beautiful creature
> Standing betwixt man and animal, sympathising with each,
> Comprehending the speech of either race, and interpreting
> The whole existence of one to the other.
> ---How happy such a life, enjoying the warm, sensuous,
> Earthy side of Nature, revelling in the merriment of woods and streams,
> Living as our four-footed kindred do...[145]

W.N. Herbert has commented that MacDiarmid's portrait of Ban MacIntyre is 'impersonal' and that it is his 'capacity to store information as much as the cultural value of the information stored that impresses MacDiarmid'[146]. Personal portraits are perhaps not MacDiarmid's main concern in this poem, however. Sorley MacLean's acknowledgement that the poetry of Gaels such as Duncan Ban MacIntyre is 'deficient in explicit humanity' seems to correspond to W.N. Herbert's criticism of MacDiarmid's 'Scotland Small' lyric from his 'Direadh' poems, that 'it is a poem which

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[144] D.H. Lawrence. 'Pan in America', *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*. Ed. Edward D. McDonald. London: William Heinemann, 1936.
[145] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk with...' *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. p.1099
[146] W.N. Herbert. *To Circumjack MacDiarmid*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p.179

concerns itself, however, magnificently, with shrubbery, not with humanity'.[147] And indeed, it is not with 'humanity' that MacDiarmid's poetry of facts is exclusively concerned. Central to an understanding of MacDiarmid's engagement with Duncan Ban MacIntyre is the surprising fact of his reliance on the ecologist Frank Fraser Darling's research on deer. The epigraph taken from Frank Fraser Darling's pioneering ecological study, *A Herd of Red Deer: a study in animal behaviour* (1937), states that 'It is very difficult for an active mind stuffed with the matter of 'Education' to play its part effectively in stalking wild animals'. In his book, Fraser Darling goes on to say:

> If you are going to observe an animal well you must know it well, and this statement is not such a glimpse of the obvious as it appears at first. It is necessary intellectually to soak in the environmental complex of the animal to be studied until you have a facility with it which keeps you as it were one move ahead. You must become *intimate* with the animal.[148] [author's italics]

This notion of 'intimacy' is picked up by MacDiarmid in 'In Talk...', with a consideration of the 'intimate, initiating experience' of observing deer in the wild, through the medium of Ban MacIntyre's poetry. This poetic 'virtual' deer-stalking leads to a state of almost visionary perception, rather like the feelings described by Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain*:

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[147] *Ibid.* p.197

[148] Frank Fraser Darling. *A Herd of Red Deer: a study in animal behaviour*. London: Oxford University Press, 1941; 1937. p.27

> The whole threshold of awareness was raised; the whole organism
> Worked with unheard-of co-ordination.[149]

This phrase, which seems to appeal directly to the poet's sense of raised consciousness, is in fact adapted from *A Herd of Red Deer*, in which Fraser Darling notes his sensations on discarding his shoes and socks in tracking the deer.

> I have been interested to note the reactions of my own senses. They all sharpened... The whole threshold of awareness was raised, I was never fatigued and stalking became very much easier. This ease in approaching animals was something more than what was gained by leaving off heavy and possibly noisy shoes. The whole organism worked in better co-ordination.[150]

MacDiarmid goes even further in his 'borrowing' from the ecologist, plundering much of the material for 'Further Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir' from other sections of the ecological study, even retaining the same running order of themes as the book does:

> And if as I think weather conditions and insect pests
> Are more important causes of movement among deer
> Than the direction of the wind, does this
> Hold true for all parts of Scotland? Some places
> Seem to depend very largely on a suitable wind
> To draw deer into them. Yet the correspondence
> Between weather and movement is abundantly clear
> And there can no longer be any doubt that deer
> Are so sensitive to meteorological changes
> As to be able to anticipate them by hours, and sometimes days.[151]

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[149] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk...' *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. p.1101
[150] Frank Fraser Darling. *A Herd of Red Deer*. p.27
[151] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Further Talk...' *Complete Poems*. Vol. I. p.633

Whilst talk of the deer's 'growth-mechanism', or the phenomenon of 'orthogenesis', might, as Herbert suggests, have baffled Ban MacIntyre, in a sense MacDiarmid wants his own modern Scottish writing to be seen to be carrying out the implications of the Gaelic poet's conclusion to 'The Praise of Ben Dorain', that:

> Is ged a thuirt mi beagan riu,
> Mun ìnnsinn uil' an dleasdnas orr',
> Chuireadh iad am bhreislich mi
> Le desimireachd chòmhraidh.[152]
>
> Though I've told a little of Ben Dorain here,
> Before I could tell all it deserves I would be
> In a delerium with the strange prolixity
> Of the talking called for, I fear.[153]

The linguistic layering and tireless cataloguing of details in the poetry of MacDiarmid's 'Mature Art' period does indeed amount, at times, to a delerium – and, some might argue, to 'prolixity' in the sense of 'tedious or tiresome lengthiness'.[154] MacDiarmid's concern, in these poems written following his attempts at Gaelic translation, is with the possibility of a true poetic insight into the natural world, of bridging the gap between man and nature. MacDiarmid praised Duncan Ban MacIntyre for his realism in

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[152] Duncan Ban MacIntyre / Donnchadh Ban Mac An T-Saior. 'Moladh Beinn Dobhrain' / 'In Praise of Ben Dorain'. *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century: A Bilingual Anthology*. Ed. Derick S. Thomson. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993.
[153] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Praise of Ben Dorain' ll.472-475. *Complete Poems*. Vol. I pp.587-600; p.600. Originally published in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940).
[154] *OED*.

describing encounters with the deer: 'only in *your* poetry,' MacDiarmid claims, do 'We have the feeling of having reached that state | All watchers of animals desire | Of having dispensed with our physical presence'. But MacDiarmid goes further, asking 'Or is that it? Is not really the bottom of our desire | Not to be ignored but to be accepted?' [155]

Such possibilities were later questioned by Iain Crichton Smith in 'Deer on the High Hills' (1962).[156] Smith had written his own fine translation of Ban MacIntyre's *Ben Dorain*, and was certainly aware of MacDiarmid's work on the subject.[157] Smith's poem interrogates the central problem of 'knowing' the deer, of getting beyond the layers of cultural constructs and pathetic fallacies to the animals themselves. Opening with some deliberately artificial similes, which somehow manage to retain a certain sense of poetic truth, Smith says the deer are 'like debutantes on a smooth ballroom floor', or 'like Louis the Sixteenth | sustained in twilight on a marble plinth'.[158] Dismissing these images, he argues that in order to see the deer as they really are, 'you must build from there and not be circumvented by sunlight...or intuitions from the sky above | the deadly rock. Or even history'. Instead:

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[155] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir'. *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. Ed. Michael Grieve & W.R. Aitken. Manchester: Carcanet, 1994.
[156] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Deer on the High Hills'. *Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1995
[157] Deer are an important motif of much twentieth-century Highland and Gaelic poetry. For example, see Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley Maclean. 'Hallaig'. *O Choille gu Bearradh / From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems in Gaelic and in English translation*. Manchester & Edinburgh: Carcanet/Birlinn, 1999. pp.226-231.
[158] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Deer on the High Hills'. *Collected Poems*. p.36

> You must build from the rain and stones
> till you can make
> a stylish deer on the high hills,
> and let its leaps be unpredictable![159]

While Ban MacIntyre 'knew them intimately, was one of them' in 'a kind of Eden', 'Nevertheless he shot them also'. The difficult thing for the human to come to terms with is that the deer are an objective reality, separate from the human observer and, in Smith's view, unknowable, even meaningless, in purely objective terms. Humans can only know the natural world, he seems to suggest, subjectively, by imposing narratives upon it:

> What is the knowledge of the deer?
> Is there a philosophy of the hills?
> Do their heads peer into the live stars?[160]
>
> Are rivers stories, and are plains their prose?
> Are fountains poetry? And are rainbows the
> wistful smiles upon a dying face?
>
> Such symbols freeze upon my desolate lips![161]

Instead, we need to recognise the things-in-themselves, that 'there is no metaphor. The stone is stony. | The deer step out in isolated air'.[162] Such an attitude recalls MacDiarmid's viewpoint, in 'On a Raised Beach', of the 'inconceivable discipline, courage, and endurance, | Self-purification and

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[159] *Ibid.* p.39
[160] *Ibid.* p.40
[161] *Ibid.* p.46
[162] *Ibid.* p.46

anti-humanity' it requires fully to know reality, suggesting that 'it is wrong to indulge in these illustrations | instead of just accepting the stones'.[163] Such an extreme identification of our understanding of the world as a mere symbol not only requires an 'Adamantine and inexorable' personality, but risks profound alienation, and it is something which neither MacDiarmid nor Smith are able to sustain in the rest of their poetry. Instead, attentiveness and the development of linguistic representation are the tactics which MacDiarmid suggests can bring us closer to an understanding of other organisms. In the spirit of 'tell[ing] all it deserves', MacDiarmid muses about the possible outcomes of an exhaustive poetry of facts:

> It would be relatively easy to write the history
> Of a pair of nesting dab-chicks or of a day in their life,
> With a continuousness and exhaustiveness that might challenge comparison,
> Without breaks, a seamless garment,
> With the most accomplished and most dangerous works of modern fiction,
> Differing from them only in not pretending to know
> The birds' minds from the inside out, but hoping at best
> To get at their nature from their movements and write their odyssey
> By working from the outside in. [164]

The idea that the 'history | Of a pair of nesting dab-chicks' might rival 'the most...dangerous works of modern fiction' is a characteristic piece of MacDiarmidean rhetoric – recalling his claim for the 'moral resemblance' of Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scots Language* to James Joyce's

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[163] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'On a Raised Beach'. *Complete Poems*. Vol. I. pp.422-433; p.429
[164] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk with...' *Complete Poems*. Vol.I. p.1100

Ulysses.[165] But despite the hype, such claims are surely what MacDiarmid's later poetic endeavours are all about – the poetry of verifiable scientific data, of materialism building on Romanticism. MacDiarmid, it seems, attempted such a poetic experiment in a related poem, 'The Nature of a Bird's World':

> I have spoken of a pair of courting cuckoos;
> Of the history of a pair of nesting dabchicks
> And of a continuous and exhaustive account of a day in their life.
> But let us take nothing for granted.
> Allen Upward used to warn us to learn
> From things themselves, not from words about the things.[166]

The Imagist credo, glanced at here by MacDiarmid's reference to Allen Upward, called for a 'direct treatment of the thing',[167] a succinctness of description which avoids a 'torrent of words' as Neil Gunn put it, and aims instead for a visual clarity.[168] MacDiarmid elsewhere claims these properties for the Gaelic language and, by implication, for himself:

> Not town-folk's speech, flat like the rest of their natures,
> But the power that can speak to the heart of others
> With that faculty of sheer description
> Which not only tells *what* a thing is, but at least
> Incidentally goes far towards telling *why*.
> But beyond this how? [169]

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[165] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'A Theory of Scots Letters'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992. pp.16-33; p.20
[166] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Nature of a Bird's World'. *Complete Poems*. pp.1352-1357; p.1352
[167] John T. Gage. *In the arresting eye : the rhetoric of imagism*. Baton Rouge & London : Louisiana State University Press, c1981. p.11
[168] Neil Gunn. 'The Flash'. *Landscape and Light*. p.235.
[169] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'In Talk...' *Complete Poems*. Vol. II. p.1099

In *The Kind of Poetry I Want*, MacDiarmid links this 'faculty of sheer description' with the ability to imitate birdsong:

> A poetry – since I was born a Scottish Gael
> Of earth's subtlest speech, born with a clever tongue,
> Moving one's tongue and lips and throat
> In bird-sounds, mocking the cheewink of the joree,
> The belly-hoot of the great horned owl –
> To put the skids under the whole of modern consciousness.[170]

Birds, as W.N. Herbert has pointed out, are one of MacDiarmid's favourite symbols for himself and for the creative process of making poems. But 'The Nature of a Bird's World' might at first sight seem unallegorical, with its awkward verses adapted, no doubt, from some as yet unidentified scientific study. The text seems to have been a fairly unlyrical enumeration of the idiosyncrasies of the behaviour of birds, speculating on the possible underlying physiological or psychological reasons for this. However, MacDiarmid's inclusion of an epigraph from Blake casts a different light on the scientific aspect of this poem:

> How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
> Is an immense World of Delight, clos'd by your senses five? [171]

Blake's joyful question transfigures the verses of scientific observation and speculation which follow, transforming 'The Nature of a Bird's World' into a

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[170] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Kind of Poetry I Want'.*Complete Poems.* Vol. II. pp.1003-1035; p.1009
[171] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Nature of a Bird's World'. *Complete Poems.* Vol. II. p.1352

poem about imaginative *perception* rather than strict scientific materialism – and by extension, a poem about the mystery of poetry itself, the 'two worlds' of the bird mirroring the double outlook of the poet.

Indeed, to argue that MacDiarmid's use of scientific vocabulary moves his poetic stance to one of objectivity or ultimate 'truth' is to ignore the fact that scientific discourse is itself a 'narrative mode', with its own vernacular traits – something which the ecocritic William Howarth points out, claiming that 'persistent attachment to cultural memory is why words in science have variable meanings'.[172] MacDiarmid's use of geological terminology goes further than that of course, with the use of mysterious scientific jargon deployed as much for their sense impressions (rather like the archaic Scots vocabulary of his earlier lyrics) as for their actual descriptive power:

> All is lithogensis, or lochia
> Carpolite fruit of the forbbiden tree . . .
> Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform,
> . . . like a blind man run
> My fingers over you, arris by arris, burr by burr,
> Slickensides, truité, rugas, foveoles [173]

Herbert points out in *To Circumjack MacDiarmid* that 'what is easily assimilable as prose starts to yield different energies when it is read as

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[172] William Howarth. 'Some Prinicples of Ecocriticism'. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryl Glotfelty & Harold Fromm. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996. pp.69-91; p.75

[173] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'On A Raised Beach'. *Complete Poems*. Vol. I p.422

poetry'.[174] Indeed, scientific language is converted to sensuous sound in this poem. The meanings of the jargon matters less than the suggestiveness of spoken words themselves; the onomatopoeic properties of the geological nouns and adjectives manage to convey a sense of the properties of the stones without recourse to detailed explanation. Sound, the elemental facet of language, certainly suits MacDiarmid's purposes here in 'going back to the bare rock', reflecting on the fundamentals. 'On a Raised Beach' in many ways marks the beginning of MacDiarmid's move towards a 'poetry of facts' which he called for in *The Kind of Poetry I Want.* The language of science, in MacDiarmid's work, is perhaps more important for its ability to spark off imaginative connections, than for its possibilities in objective description. This shares much in common with the phenomenological view of poetry expressed by Gaston Bachelard, when he writes of the 'phenomenological reverberation' of the isolated poetic image, and 'the vocal importance... of a word'.[175]

MacDiarmid's frequent practice of pulling paragraphs out of their text-book context and deploying them as striking poetic images, or off-hand enigmatic remarks in the midst of his vast poetic catalogues, was certainly inspired both by his reading of that other great lister, Walt Whitman, as well as multi-

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[174] W.N. Herbert. *To Circumjack MacDiarmid.* p.161
[175] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space.* p.xxvii; p.xx

vocal Modernists such as Joyce and Pound. Indeed, it is in his 'poetry of fact' plagiarism that he becomes most successful in the Imagist techniques espoused by the likes of Pound. This is epitomised by his poem, 'Perfect', which is a versification of a prose observation by the Welsh writer, Glyn Jones, and was hailed as 'the poem that...the Imagists talked about but did not write...an object lesson in the meaningful use of vowel-music, consonance, and alliteration'.[176] Indeed, despite MacDiarmid's protests of unconscious transposition, it is clear that he was in the habit of extracting prose from natural history and scientific sources, which was then chopped up and deployed in various poetic stratagems to support his argument for a 'poetry of facts'.

All this picking and choosing would seem to go against the ideals of scientific observation, but perhaps here MacDiarmid is conforming to the distinction which William Howarth makes between 'mimesis', the use of language to represent, and 'deixis', or linguistic 'pointing':

> Through *deixis*, meaning develops from what is said or signed relative to physical space: I-you, here-there, this-that... *deixis* expresses relative direction and orientation, the cognitive basis for description...one can't just name objects but point to what they do:

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[176] Cited in Alan Bold. *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography*. London: Murray, 1988. p.423

> pines live in sandy soil, oaks in clay, and thus their rates of water absorption differ.[177]

Perhaps the transposition of words and phrases from their usual, relatively obscure, scientific context into the pages of MacDiarmid's long poems not only fulfils his own criterion of 'a poetry of facts' and the old adage that poetry should 'please and instruct', but also goes some way towards fulfilling the criterion of 'ecopoetics' which Bate talks about in *The Song of the Earth*. Edwin Morgan's article on 'Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's Later Work' links MacDiarmid's aim of a 'perfect fusion' of science and art in his work to Wordsworth's earlier prediction that 'The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper object of the Poet's art'.[178] Morgan goes on to characterise MacDiarmid's poetry in biological terms:

> It is not so much an organism as a colony, a living and in one sense formless association of organisms which share a common experience. Shape and architectonics are not so important as the quick movements of the thought – the feelers in the water, moved partly by the surrounding currents and partly by their own volition and partly in response to the movement of neighbour tentacles – while a succession of images, illustrations, and analogies is presented to it.[179]

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[177] William Howarth. 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism'. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty & Harold Fromm. Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1996.p.74

[178] William Wordsworth, quoted by Edwin Morgan in 'Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's Later Work'. *Essays*. Cheadle, Cheshire: Carcanet, 1974. pp.203-213; p.203

[179] *Ibid*. p.212

Morgan's assessment of MacDiarmid's 'mature art' as a colony of organisms anticipates some of Bate's ideas about 'ecopoetics', and demonstrates that ecological and ecocritical ideas have a prehistory in Scottish literature which has until now been overlooked. Morgan's metaphor of the 'colony' is a suitably organic term for what Mikhail Bakhtin theorised as 'heteroglossia', the multi-voicedness of any utterance – a concept which would surely have appealed to MacDiarmid if it had then been available to him.

What broadly emerges from literary work of this period are two main methods of representation of the natural world. Firstly, there is the phenomenological method, which makes use of the sounds of words and the associations of poetic images, and which is therefore not an objective representation of exterior reality, but is somehow trying to get at the 'essence' of it by evoking human responses to striking archetypal images. Secondly, there is the supposedly 'materialist' method argued for by Hugh MacDiarmid in his 'poetry of facts', based on objective, scientific forms of knowledge. However, it is debatable whether MacDiarmid's poetry ever reaches true objectivity – the 'life history of a pair of nesting dab-chicks' school of poetic representation. Instead, MacDiarmid employs phenomenological methods to his poetry of knowledge, allowing poetic images and metaphors derived from scientific text to 'reverberate' in the reader's unconscious, performing 'deixis' rather than 'mimesis', and thus

facilitating an understanding and intimacy which would not be possible with a straightforward description. Jonathan Bate, in *The Song of the Earth*, points out the problem in modernist and postmodernist thought, that language is seen as the basis for the perception of reality, rather than external nature. Certainly, MacDiarmid, writing out of a modernist tradition which included the linguistic experimentation of such heteroglossic practitioners as Joyce and Pound, would agree with that. But heteroglossia, as discussed in previous chapters, can actually be a way of representing human 'dwelling' or 'belonging' on the earth. In MacDiarmid's multivocalism, he is attempting to explore the interconnections between words and environments, poetic theory and external fact. MacDiarmid's fusion of Gaelic and scientific methods of observation thus produces a unique theory of poetry which in its own complex way sets about negotiating a conceptual 'home' on the earth. What Bate calls 'ecopoetics' shares some distinct characteristics with MacDiarmid's 'poetry of facts'.

Although the 1960s might seem to bring about a dislodging of the age of MacDiarmid and Muir, in fact the coming of 1960s 'countercultures' highlighted the significance of ecologically-minded aspects of writing in earlier twentieth-century Scotland, and provided the opportunity for these aspects to flourish in an international climate which was increasingly tuned-in to green issues. In 1961 Hugh MacDiarmid wrote a poem called 'The

Unholy Loch' against the proposed Polaris nuclear base at Holy Loch, which was printed in a pamphlet produced by Bertrand Russell's campaign for nuclear disarmament.[180] Calling to mind some of his earliest poetry about the earth, such as 'Au Clair de la Lune' or 'Science and Poetry', this late poem speaks of the 'orb' of earth, as 'the only ground of human hope' in contrast to the poisonous 'genocidal intent' of the people behind the Polaris project. MacDiarmid was involved in a variety of such protests, participating in Bertrand Russell's famous 'Committee of 100' sit-down protest in Trafalgar Square in 1961. 'The Unholy Loch', while admittedly rather mediocre in style, nevertheless demonstrates MacDiarmid's engagement with the global environmental politics of the 1960s, a decade which brought radical young writers and thinkers like Alexander Trocchi into contact with the likes of MacDiarmid, that well-known opposer of Beatniks.

The influence of Beat poetry had percolated into Europe from America, where the 'founder members' of the Beat movement included the environmental activist and 'deep ecology' philosopher, Gary Snyder. Snyder directed the radical energies of the Beat movement towards a new conception of human relationships to the natural world in his collection of poetry and ecological writings, *Earth House Hold* (1969). The decade also saw the publication of books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a

[180] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'The Unholy Loch'. *Complete Poems.* Vol. II. pp.1478-1479.

meditation on the effects of pollution on wildlife and humans in America, and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). The late 1960s was a particularly fruitful time for Scottish literature, with poets and novelists including Edwin Morgan, Archie Hind, George Mackay Brown, Iain Crichton Smith and Douglas Dunn all publishing work. However, despite MacDiarmid's poetic efforts, there was still an apparent division between rural and urban writing in Scotland. Practitioners of the 'Glasgow novel' such as Hind and George Friel were producing work with a politically hard edge which at first sight seems opposed to the likes of Crichton Smith and Mackay Brown, whose focus remained on the islands and rural environments of Scotland. The contrast would seem to be encapsulated in the near-simultaneous publication of Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place* (1966) and George Mackay Brown's *The Calendar of Love* (1967). While the Beats' innovations had a profound influence on Edwin Morgan's work, it is also true that Hugh MacDiarmid occupied an important place in Morgan's Scottish heritage. Morgan was conscious, in his own work on poetry and science, to be engaging with some of the issues MacDiarmid raised in his later poetry. Writing in 1963, Morgan drew parallels between the startling perspectives on the planet earth gained by the first space mission and the need for new perspectives in poetry, exemplified by MacDiarmid's own work.

> When Yuri Gagarin was circling the earth in his spaceship Voztok he was not only exposed to a new physical and mental experience ... he also received an aesthetic experience which no man had had before, and his reaction to the 'delicate and lovely' and 'hard-to-describe' blue aureole surrounding the globe ... deserve to be noted both by non-scientists who say there is nothing 'human' to be gained from such experiments and by scientists who say that instruments would record everything better than men in any case. The fact is that man must react, as man, to his whole environment.[181]

Morgan's acknowledgement that the concept of the 'environment' had expanded to include the entire planet is actually in keeping with contemporary environmental perspectives – the sort of consciousness that would lead to the celebration of 'Earth Day' in 1970 or the creation of Friends of the Earth in 1971. Morgan's 'The Chaffinch Map of Scotland' is a concrete poem which, although probably based on a page from a linguistic atlas, neverthless bears more than a passing resemblance to ecological species distribution maps, with the local dialect words for chaffinch organised on the page according to their geographical distribution across Scotland:

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[181] Edwin Morgan. 'A Glimpse of Petavius'. *Essays*. p.14 (originally published in *Gambit*, 1963)

A clever experiment in concrete poetry, 'The Chaffinch Map of Scotland' also reflects Morgan's willingness to experiment with new ways of conceptualising relationships between humans and the environment – here, in the diversity of regional names for a bird.

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182 Edwin Morgan. 'The Chaffinch Map of Scotland'. *Collected Poems 1949-1987*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1990.

Morgan is often characterised as the 'poet laureate' of Glasgow, since much of his poetry is localised within Scottish urban spaces and draws its energies from the life of the city. His sequence of *Glasgow Sonnets* (1973) offers an interesting counterpoint to the Glasgow novels of this time period, transforming the politically-inflected concerns of the novelists into lyrics, striking not only for their artistry but for their representational power. MacDiarmid famously rejected the lyric in his later work, claiming it could not fully represent the complexities of modern life – particularly the socialist agenda he took from the Communists. Morgan's *Glasgow Sonnets* contain little to suggest the natural world, little, indeed to suggest any sort of life other than abject urban poverty and despair. Animal life is functional or alienating: 'a shilpit dog fucks grimly by the close', whilst a 'cat's eyes glitter' from beneath an abandoned baby's pram.[183] Similarly, the only signs of vegetative life are 'roses of mould', and the only houses not homes, but condemned tenements. The only possibility of escape or transcendence here seems to be represented by the concrete flyovers' 'loops of light', not the empty promises of environmentalists:

> Environmentalists, ecologists
> and conservationists are fine no doubt.
> Pedestrianization will come out
> fighting, riverside walks march off the lists,
> pigeons and starlings be somnambulists

[183] Edwin Morgan. 'Glasgow Sonnets'. *Collected Poems 1949-1987*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1990. p.290.

in far-off suburbs[184]

Morgan's dismissal of the activities of 'Environmentalists, ecologists | and conservationists' reflects the faddish, middle-class aspect of popular environmentalism as it stood in 1960s and 70s Britain. Despite the origins of the idea in the nineteenth century, the concept of ecology had after all, only been in the domain of public consciousness for a relatively short period of time – although it is notable how quickly Hugh MacDiarmid picked up on its significance in the 1940s. Environmentalism and ecology had, for most of the century, gone about under the guise of geographical and biological sciences, and of regional planning, but to many people 'ecology' itself meant nothing more than stuffy conservationism, whilst the radical 'green' politics of ecological thought, while receiving attention in America, had not quite filtered into British environmental consciousness as an explicit movement. For Morgan in the *Glasgow Sonnets*, it was all very well for the inhabitants of suburbia to want to improve the aesthetics of the city, but 'riverside walks' would be cold comfort to the reality of life in the poorest tenements.

However, Edwin Morgan is not only a poet of the city, and even in his urban poems, there are celebrations of wildness and rural experience. In 'The Third Day of the Wolf', he writes an elegy for a Canadian timberwolf which has

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[184] Edwin Morgan. 'Glasgow Sonnets'. *Collected Poems 1949-1987*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1990. p.291

escaped from a zoo only to be captured and killed. Morgan seems aware of the importance for, and the fragility of, wildness, saying 'How strong man is | with his helicopters and his planes | his radios and rifles!':

> O wild things, wild things
> take care, beware of him.
> Man mends his fences.
> Take care of the warrant
> for death. How good
> he is at that,
> with his dirty sack
> ready to lay on you:
> it is necessary.
> But I have a warrant
> to lay this too,
> a wreath for wildness,
> timber-wolf, timber-wolf.[185]

In the same collection, 'The Starlings in George Square' celebrates the meeting of humans and nature in an urban environment, where the 'high stonefields' of city centre Glasgow are inhabited by starlings, whose song 'scatters in swooping arcs, | a stab of confused sweetness'. All of this links up with Gary Snyder's comment that wildness 'is not limited to the two percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere...Exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of wild systems, the visible hardy stalks and stems of vacant lots and railroads'.[186]

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[185] Edwin Morgan, *Collected Poems*. p.152
[186] Gary Snyder. 'The Etiquette of Freedom'. *The Practice of the Wild: Essays*. New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp.3-24.

The fact that links between rural and urban environments were beginning to be questioned during this period is evident from the publication of both Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* in 1964, and Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* in 1973. Marx's book is the first in a tradition of American critical studies of cultural attitudes towards the natural world, and is useful in this context as a signifier of the changing attitudes to literature and ecology. Marx points out that American writers fail to design 'satisfactory resolutions for their pastoral fables', since the ideal of the American 'virgin' wilderness no longer exists. The recognition that the American pastoral 'ideal landscape' is an impossibility means that 'an inspiriting vision of a humane community has been reduced to a token of individual survival...the old symbol of reconciliation is obsolete.[187] The unsatisfactory nature of pastoral should not, he argues, be seen as the fault of the writer, since the writer is clarifying 'the root conflict of our culture'.[188] Williams also notes the disruption of pastoral modes of representation in the twentieth century, as traditional agricultural communities were broken up in the move towards increased industrialisation and urbanisation, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, Williams suggested that narratives which recognise

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[187] Leo Marx. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. p.364
[188] *Ibid.* p.365

the long heritage of rural Britain combined within the context of modern urban life are of crucial importance:

> It is easy to separate the country and the city and then their modes of literature: the rural or regional; the urban or metropolitan. [...] But there are always some writers who insist on the connections, and among these are a few who see the transition itself as decisive, in a complex interaction and conflict of values.[189]

In fact, the interaction between rural and urban environments had been acknowledged in Scottish fiction long before the 1960s, in novels such as Edwin Muir's *Poor Tom*, George Blake's *The Shipbuilders* and even Edward Gaitens' *Dance of the Apprentices*.[190] The title of Archie Hind's Glasgow novel, *The Dear Green Place*, might suggest the image of a pastoral landscape which belies its urban, industrial setting. Indeed, it is hard to think of a less appropriate name for a novel which opens with an overview of a Scottish industrial wasteland, and closes with its protagonist, trapped in a cycle of poverty and disappointment, vomiting on a Clyde ferry. Hind highlights this distinction by quoting a piece of well-known Glasgow doggerel, based on the city's coat-of-arms:

> This is the tree that never grew,
> This is the bird that never flew,

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[189] Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City*. p.264

[190] Beat Witschi draws attention to glimpses of the natural world contrasted with urban experience in these novels in his study *Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism: A Study of Alasdair Gray's Fiction*. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang, 1991. pp.44-50. See Edwin Muir, *Poor Tom*, Edinburgh: Harris, 1982; 1932; George Blake, *The Shipbuilders*, London: Faber, 1935; Edward Gaitens, *Dance of the Apprentices*. Glasgow: W. MacLellan, 1948.

This is the fish that never swam,
This is the bell that never rang.[191]

While the naming of the novel is certainly intended as a sardonic swipe at the industrial decline and aesthetic dearth of the city in the 1960s, the reverberations of the name, which translates the Gaelic root of the word 'Glasgow', are felt throughout the book, with the result that the ghost of the pastoral world is never far away. Others have commented on the novel's references to the Gaelic and agricultural origins of Glasgow, with the implied distance between the urban present and the pastoral past.[192] I would go further, however, and suggest that *The Dear Green Place* can itself be read as a sort of distorted pastoral, bringing the urban roots of pastoralism back to the flashpoint of tension itself, the industrial city.

The negative representations of urban environments to be found in works such as *The Dear Green Place* or Edwin Morgan's *Glasgow Sonnets* owe as much to an engagement with ideas and ideals about the natural world and the legacy of pastoralism as they do to urban realism or socialist concerns. Novels such as Hind's necessarily deal with the socio-economic realities of urban places, and have even been given a name - 'The Glasgow novel' - which brings to mind these themes. However, the pastoral is never far away

[191] Archie Hind. *The Dear Green Place*. Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1984; 1966. p. 17
[192] Douglas Gifford. *The Dear Green Place? The novel in the West of Scotland*. Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1984.

in 1960s representations of Glasgow. *The Dear Green Place* is a novel as much about environmental impact and ideas about rurality as it is about urban experience.

> The mossy slopes harden into packed banks of black hardened mud, the soft greenery is a *virid* colour from the stretches of soda waste, the rippling affluents gush from cast iron pipes, an oily chemical sediment; we hear now the din of machinery, the thumping of hammers and the hiss and blast of steam and gas. Then the din dies down to a rattle and we come to the idyllic spot where the gentle oxen crossed and the little Molendinar burn flowed into the broad shallows of the river; the spot which the Gaels named Gles Chu, the spot where as legend had it St. Mungo recovered his lost ring from the belly of a salmon. The little valley of the Molendinar is now stopped with two centuries of refuse - soap, tallow, cotton waste, slag, soda, bits of leather, broken pottery, tar and caoutchouc - the waste products of a dozen industries and a million lives, and it is built over with slums, yards, streets and factories.[193] [my italics]

Originally meaning 'verdant', the term 'virid' is a measure of the distance between Glasgow's pastoral past and its industrial present in Hind's novel.[194] It is difficult to read this narrative history of Glasgow presented by the novel's protagonist, Mat Craig, without also observing a history of environmental impact - the transformation of 'country' into 'city', the pollution of the once-pure Clyde, and the layers of 'waste products', 'slums' and 'factories' deliberately contrasted with the initial 'idyllic spot' denoted by Gaelic place-names. The original strath is presented as a pastoral idyll,

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[193] Archie Hind. *The Dear Green Place*. p.20

[194] As in pastoral lines such as James Macpherson's 'there smiles the virid grass | While through the shaded green, rough murmuring, glides | A brook crystalline'. James Macpherson, 'The Hunter', Canto VII, ll.164-166. *Poems of Ossian*. Edinburgh: Thin, 1971; 1805.

with 'soft greenery' and 'thymy banks', the only sounds 'the hum of the wandering bee and the splash of water on stone', but the surveying eye moves:

> down from the idyllic and uncertain past into the reaches of the Clyde where the air begins to darken, the horizon is smudged, and intermingled with grazing fields, trees, farms and gardens are coal heaps, pit heads, corrugated iron sheds, foundries, machine shops, bings and mills...[195]

However, Mat's attitude towards this transformation is one of ambivalence, taking pleasure in the idea that the 'river had become something of a human artefact', which he finds 'exciting and satisfying'.[196] Indeed, the boundaries between the supposedly separate categories of 'country' and 'city' are blurred in this novel. In the unremitting detail of Hind's descriptions, it is almost as if nature is the alien factor in this landscape, polluting the concrete with dampness and greenery:

> It was a particular kind of landscape, a mixture of human and natural industry which intrigued him. Each aspect seemed to take on and mingle with some of the characteristics of the other. The grass and willows growing along the banks of the river were grey and sooty looking... the mud selvedge of the river showed rainbow tints from an oily sediment... the brick buildings were heavily marked from the weather, the power station had great damp streaks running down it, the pointing on the factory was all crumbled and the bricks eaten with damp and covered with a thin green mossy slime.[197]

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[195] Archie Hind. *The Dear Green Place.* p.19
[196] *Ibid.* p.19
[197] *Ibid.* p.26

The Dear Green Place is in many ways a novel about a boy's relationship with a river – the industrial, polluted Clyde – and in this sense it is a distorted, post-war reflection of Neil Gunn's *Highland River*.

> He knew every waste pipe that gushed its mucky sediment into the river, every path along its bank, every forsaken spot and lonely stretch where no one but children ever went, where between long factory walls and the river there were narrow paths that led merely from one open stretch of dumping ground to the next. Here he had played as a child in the oldest industrial landscape in the world, amongst the oldest factories in the world, and it had been through this landscape that he had walked when he had once felt so unaccountably happy.[198]

This, surely, is a strange adaptation of Hardy's concept of 'local knowledge'. It seems incongruous that someone should describe the polluted stretches of the Clyde with the same fondness and intimacy experienced, for example, by Kenn in exploring the strath in *Highland River*. But to ignore the reality that most of the Scottish population does live in urban zones would be to pastoralise – or kailyardise – Scottish life and environment. Hind is certainly using irony to show the degradation of the Clydeside industrial wasteland, especially given the unemployment and poverty of 1960s Glasgow. Belonging to a generation of Scottish writers who grew up with Muir's *Autobiography* and the novels of Neil Gunn, Hind is also challenging the pretence that the emotions of the rural child exploring its environment are different, or any less significant, than for the urban child. This is not to say

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[198] *Ibid.* p.21

that Hind finds the countryside less attractive than the town, or that exploring a Highland burn is not more satisfying and pleasurable than exploring a polluted river, but it does lend the whole experience of growing up in this urban landscape a dignity which it has often been denied.

In contrast to the impact of the 'Glasgow novel' and its gritty realism, George Mackay Brown's work may seem an anachronism in the modern literary scene, with a possibly unhealthy obsession with the archaic, mythological history of the Orkneys, which seeks to deny the reality of contemporary life. Terry Gifford has criticised Mackay Brown's poetry for its reliance on myth, its 'wish-fulfilment' form of pastoral. Commenting on the poet's use of 'archaic words', he wryly (and falsely) suggests that 'No one ever drinks beer in a Mackay Brown poem. Only 'ale' is served in Arcadia'.[199] Gifford calls this 'undifferentiated ahistorical mythologising':

> The problem with such undifferentiated ahistorical mythologising is the danger of fatalism... Mackay Brown's Arcadia forces fewer moral questions than Muir's, and there is more mythic fatalism in his nostalgia for Orkney life.[200]

What Gifford is really criticising is Mackay Brown's lack of an overtly socio-political agenda, based on his reading of Mackay Brown's poetry as a

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[199] Terry Gifford. *Green Voices: Understanding contemporary nature poetry*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1995. p.33
[200] *Ibid.* p.38

'pejorative pastoral',[201] to borrow his own phraseology. Whilst Brown's work does indeed draw upon pastoral conventions and images, Gifford's criticism might be more valid if Mackay Brown was an urban writer performing some sort of wish-fulfilment exercise by looking at Orkney from the outside. But Mackay Brown, as Gifford notes, had lived in Orkney for all his life, with the exception of a couple of years spent in lowland Scotland. The motivation for a native writer's 'pastoralising' of the islands is perhaps more difficult to fathom. Is he to be condemned because he does not concern himself with the urban definitions of what it means to be a 'realistic' writer?

Iain Crichton Smith, in his essay, 'Real People in a Real Place', tackles the distorted view of a sort of literary tourism, which does not 'take the islander seriously', and instead represents him as 'vague, impractical, poetical, not at all like "us"'. In contrast to 'the real world with its constant grind and envy and ambition' the islands are transformed into an undemanding 'happy comedy' which ignores the reality of the environment and its ways of life. This, at first glance, would seem to be the same criticism that Gifford is levelling at Mackay Brown, that he panders to the expectations and prejudices of an escape-seeking urban public by creating a version of Orkney in his poetry and prose which is simply no longer valid. After all, Mackay Brown frequently complains of the incursions of technology and

[201] Terry Gifford. *Pastoral.* London & New York: Routledge, 1999. p.2

homogenising 'modern life' into the islands, complaining of 'washing machines, cars, TV, telephones everywhere'[202] and the danger of the 'defeat of the imagination', that 'in a generation or two we will all be identical zombies'.[203] All this resentment of technology recalls Edwin Muir's similar unease in *Scottish Journey*, and seems to ally Mackay Brown with the returning exile who Iain Crichton Smith criticises, for 'when he sees television sets in the houses, [he] regrets their presence as if the islanders had somehow let him down.'[204] But Mackay Brown was not an exile from his islands. Apart from brief spells at Newbattle Abbey College in Dalkeith, and then at Edinburgh University, he was a permanent resident in his Orkney home. Was he romanticising the islands from within? Smith, whilst criticising the idyllic view of the Scottish islands, nevertheless consciously contrasts their rural environments and community-based living with what he perceives as the alienation and degradation of much urban life. Although it is possible to be 'happy in the city'[205], and while the history of the islands has been one of 'exile and disorientation'[206], Smith sees city life in much the same way as Morgan represented the slums in the *Glasgow Sonnets*:

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[202] George Mackay Brown. Letter to Willa Muir, 18th April 1966. National Library of Scotland. Acc.10557/4.
[203] George Mackay Brown. Letter to Willa Muir, 6th May 1965. National Library of Scotland. Acc.10557/4.
[204] Iain Crichton Smith. 'Real People in a Real Place'. p. 17
[205] *Ibid.* p.17
[206] *Ibid.* p.41

> the impression of sordidness...travelling through British cities, the breakdown of transport, the graffiti which shows the aggression of the 'homeless,' the language of hatred, ferocious and misspelt [sic], the feeling that one has of an urban world breaking down: the rushing from late trains to vandalised telephones, as if this was a land where people no longer feel at home.[207]

'Where is the home of the urban dweller now?' Smith asks, before going on to suggest that island life, with its 'idea of community, the idea of a culture' can offer an alternative to the 'alienation and abstraction' of the cities. These themes certainly have their roots in the thought of writers like Edwin Muir, but where Muir could only offer visions of a past rustic idyll and the practical suggestion of 'making do', Smith suggests the possibilities of a practical return.

> Why should the islander not be allowed to see his home as a home, as the place he wants to be in? There is no doubt that for most of us home is the place where there are resonances which never again are to be found elsewhere, though that is not to say that these resonances belong to a dream. Home is the place where we feel right, wherever that home may be. ..The islands were never an Eden from which we were thrust by the sword of economics: it may have been a home but it was never an Eden.[208]

In this sense, a reading of Mackay Brown's work does not reveal a 'pejorative pastoral' but more a representation of a regionally distinct community. In the novel *Greenvoe* (1972), he offers just such a representation, with no central 'hero' but a series of interwoven voices and interwoven lives of the small

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[207] *Ibid.* pp.42-43
[208] *Ibid.* p.18

island community. Perhaps the nature of the vision of the Orkney Islands which he is trying to portray might best be understood through the application of Bakhtinian theory, which seeks to emphasise 'architectonics' or 'interrelationships', and is sympathetic to the ideas of both ecology and communities.

In *Greenvoe,* the arrival of the 'guest' signifies division, the sinister stranger on the island bringing with him disruption and eventual devastation. But this is not to say that the Orkney Islands are represented as an enclosed space, hostile to strangers. The arrival of the Indian silk salesman, for instance, is seen to enrich the island, although individuals in the community may react with ambivalence towards him. The community in Mackay Brown's work, as in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair,* is not a univocal entity existing in some sort of idyllic vacuum, but a heteroglossic one; ambivalent, by turns harmonious or contradictory, the voices expressing the discord and disharmony of individuals which are subsumed within wider societal harmony - a concept which is represented in Mackay Brown's work as a 'seamless garment', interestingly recalling the similar image employed

by MacDiarmid to symbolise by turns the unity of the Workers or the potentialities of poetic representation.[209]

Speech on the island varies from the 'heroic voices' of the 'gentry' to the crofters and fishermen whose speech is 'slow and wondering, like water lapping amongst stones'.[210] Mackay Brown does not need to explicitly express a moral judgement or political viewpoint in his creative work; he lets the heteroglossic nature of his writings do that for him – the combined voices of the Orkney islands themselves. In contrast to this heteroglossic variety is 'the guest', the bureaucrat who signifies the destruction of the island by the Black Star project. This stranger does not speak, does not engage in the heteroglossia of the island in any way. Even his name, scrawled in the guestbook at the inn, is unreadable:

> It was not a name, it was more a strange involuted squiggle, a sign or a hieroglyph out of the remote past or the remote future.[211]

Bakhtin wrote that discourse is defined by certain 'speech genres' which the speakers must tacitly agree upon in order to engage in a dialogue. But the stranger's silence prevents such dialogue, and denies communal life:

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[209] See George Mackay Brown, *Magnus*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000. p.* ; Hugh MacDiarmid, 'A Seamless Garment' in *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (1931); repr. *Complete Poems*. Vol I. Manchester: Carcanet, 1993. pp.311-314.
[210] George Mackay Brown. *Greenvoe*. London: Longman, 1977; 1972. p.7
[211] *Ibid.* p.40

> men must dance to some music, answer to some utterance. For our worship is erected now, all over the world, in place of the Word, the Number. And the belly is filled with uniform increasingly tasteless bread, the hands cannot have enough of possessing, face by face by face comes from the same precise mould and gazes, a rigid numbered unseeing mask, into the golden future.[212]

The 'speech genre' of the bureaucrat is that of the 'number' rather than the 'word', an alien, cataloguing form of discourse which reduces the worth of the islanders to 'Black Star potential: 9' or 'Black Star potential: Nil' on an index card.[213] The 'number' is thus associated with everything that is not 'natural': technology, concrete, destruction - much the same unholy trinity which Muir feared in his own work. But where Muir felt unable to provide an answer to the problem of the 'machine in the garden', Mackay Brown's antidote is focused on the concept of 'community', of 'belonging'. Keeping in mind Bakhtin's argument about the power of folk culture, whose rituals reflect the cyclical aspects of the seasons, of birth, death and the body, Mackay Brown's focus on these cycles of destruction and renewal offer some hope. In his scenes involving the initiation rites of the crofters, the 'Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen' (interestingly, a concept which Edwin Morgan also employs in his 1972 collection of concrete and experimental poetry, *The Horseman's Word*) Mackay Brown offsets the daily trivial incidents of life with the ancient, pagan roots of agricultural knowledge and ritual. This picks

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[212] *Ibid.* p.87
[213] *Ibid.* p.228

up on resonances from both Edwin Muir and Neil Gunn, who recognised the importance of concepts such as animal sacrifice and folk culture in their own work. But Mackay Brown consciously opposes folk culture with 'officialdom' in much the same way as Bakhtin:

> The feast is always essentially related to time, either to the recurrence of an event in the natural (cosmic) cycle, or to biological or historic timeliness. Moreover, through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, or change and renewal, always led to a festive perception of the world.[214]

For Bakhtin, folk rituals offer an alternative 'second world and a second life outside officialdom'.[215] George Mackay Brown seems to understand this idea of folk culture as an antidote to 'officialdom' and technology. Officialdom's 'intolerant, one-sided tone of seriousness'[216] is countered, in the novel, by 'the people's unofficial truth',[217] evident from the continuation of the 'very ancient brutal beautiful ceremony' of the Horseman's initiation.[218] If 'pastoralism' disenfranchises the 'real people' of the supposed idyll, then Mackay Brown's representations of the Orkney Islands can hardly be unproblematically pigeonholed as 'pastoral', even if it does rely on certain

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[214] Mikhail Bakhtin. from *Rabelais and His World* (1965) in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. Ed. Pam Morris. London: Arnold Publishers, 1994. pp.198-199.
[215] *Ibid.* p.197
[216] *Ibid.* p.208
[217] *Ibid.*.p.209
[218] Letter from George Mackay Brown to Willa Muir. 21st June 1969. Willa Muir Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc.10557/4.

pastoral conventions and modes of expression. An idyll denies time and change, and erases the individual personality in preference for what Iain Crichton Smith called a 'vague' and 'misty' representation of rural people. But what emerges in Mackay Brown's writings is both a celebration of personalities and a history of change, with one wave after another of incomers to the island, each bringing with them their own traditions and technologies. The eviction of the crofters and fishermen of *Greenvoe* by the agents of sinister progress reflects the long history of violent evictions in the Highlands and Islands by wealthy landowners. Behind these human changes, though, lie the cycles of the seasons and the lives of the animals – echoing in prose what Edwin Muir had expressed in poetic myths and emblems.

Ancient human artefacts, such as the brochs which appear in both Gunn's and Mackay Brown's writings, or the 'eirdes' or 'earth-houses' described by Lewis Grassic Gibbon, are representative of the perceived ancient connection with the earth.[219] Rather than a sentimental or romanticised view of this primitive relationship, Brown introduces ideas of totemic sacrifice and ritual behaviour, which develops from Edwin Muir's abstracted classical, mediaeval and Christian influences into a more concrete, primitive concept

[219] See Lewis Grassic Gibbon. 'Clay'. *Scottish Scene*; repr. *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*. Ed. Valentina Bold. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2001. pp.69-81; p.79

of human-nature relationships. In many ways, George Mackay Brown is a poet on the far side of that cycle of folk culture – a culture which he is concerned is coming to an end. This concern does not arise merely out of a conservative wish for things always to stay the same, but for the worry that faceless progress will do away with individuality and personal freedoms. Mackay Brown's more concrete emphasis on folk culture and heritage draws both reader and author closer to the community and the earth on which it depends, rather than establishing the conceptual distance common to the idyllic pastoral.

But Mackay Brown's novels and poetry speak of the possibility of a connection with the natural world which defies the intrusion of technology – and avoids the fragmentary aspect of Muir's modernist-influenced perceptions. Brown's writings represent an evolving awareness of what pastoral might entail – an ecological literary genre which demands a place in modern life. George Mackay Brown is not the end of a tradition, but part of an ongoing process in Scottish literature which recognises the importance of myth and ritual in our relationship with the natural world, as well as the differing abilities of poetry and prose to maintain or transform this fundamental relationship. Such fundamental concerns with community, environment and shared responsibility, both for the 'belongers' and the 'non-belongers', are perhaps more important now than they ever were: there has

indeed, to borrow Morgan's words of 1962, been a 'day of reckoning' which recognises that 'language, myth, nature' are relevant precisely *because* we live in an age of technology. Ultimately, what writers like Muir and Mackay Brown, Shepherd and Gunn, even MacDiarmid and Morgan, value above all is the human capacity for 'naming' and 'dwelling', and the ability for poetic language to fulfil its potential as 'the brilliant, vibrating interface between the human and the non-human'.[220] That is why their writings continue to matter, and why these works should be seen not just as some Scottish rural enclave, but as part of a wider literature which explores our relationship with the natural world in ways which are conscious of ecological theories and questions. Edwin Morgan recently suggested that what matters for poetry is 'Biodiversity, whether vegetal, animal, human, geophysical, or astrophysical'.[221] Though they belong to a younger generation of Scottish writers, contemporary authors such as John Burnside, Kathleen Jamie and Alan Warner are ensuring that a 'biodiverse' Scottish literature of the twenty-first century continues to discover new ways of exploring our crucial relationship with the natural world. It is their work which will be the subject of the next chapter.

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[220] Edwin Morgan. 'Roof of Fireflies', *Strong Words*. p.192
[221] *Ibid*. p.192

Chapter 5:
Contemporary Visions

> Whenever we think of home
> we come to this:
> the handful of birds and plants we know by name [1]

> poetry's a line of defence; poetry's not very good at getting out there fighting, but it's very good at holding a last line of defence... And it could be that poetry is holding a very good line of defence here against the intrusions of globalisation, the mass market, the ecological threat...[2]

John Burnside, Kathleen Jamie and Alan Warner are three young Scottish writers who are not only reviewing human relationships with nature, but also the role writing has to play in exploring and strengthening that relationship - helping to determine the ecological 'value' of poetry and fiction. What I want to argue in this final chapter is that in Scotland, contemporary poetry, and lyricism more generally, constitute an ecological 'line of defence' - providing a space in which reader and author can examine their relationship to the world around them. While I do not wish to suggest that these writers form any kind of conscious 'school' or affiliation, what their work shares in common is a lucid and intelligent lyrical vision which seeks to re-centre and redefine concepts of nature and rural environments. In an age of environmental crisis, which also suffers from attendant postmodern

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[1] John Burnside. 'Ports'. *The Asylum Dance*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2000. p.1
[2] Kathleen Jamie interviewed by Lilias Fraser. *Scottish Studies Review*. Vol.2 No.1 (Spring 2001) p.20.

anxieties about globalisation, corporatisation and loss of cultural or natural heritage, such literary projects are not only relevant, but crucial. John Burnside recently endorsed this view, stating:

> I think more people are realising that the relationship we have with the natural world, the whole natural world, not just green woods and verges and stuff, but with other things, cockroaches and other people, is the main thing we should be exploring right now.[3]

It has been suggested that Kathleen Jamie could be viewed as 'a nature poet who has been sidetracked by "issues"' - meaning issues of gender, culture and national identity which have, to date, been the main contexts in which her poetry has been viewed. [4] This comment, however, implicitly suggests that to be a 'nature poet' is to avoid an engagement with political 'issues' - an assertion with which both Jamie and Burnside would vehemently disagree. Burnside criticises this view in his essay 'Strong Words', finding himself 'dismayed by the common misapprehension that a poet who makes such a choice - the choice of a quest, as it were, as opposed to a settlement - has no political or social interests or usefulness'.[5]

Burnside evades labelling of all forms, but that did not stop him being described as the 'token nature poet' of the Arts Council 'New

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[3] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. (unpublished transcription) n.pag.
[4] J. Smith, 'Critical Perspective on Kathleen Jamie', *Contemporary Writers Website.* (http://www. contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth02C5P102112626707) n.pag. [accessed 12th May 2004]
[5] John Burnside. 'Strong Words'. *Strong Words: modern poets on modern poetry.* Ed. W.N. Herbert & Matthew Hollis. London: Bloodaxe, 2000. p.259

Generation' promotion in the early nineties. The term 'nature poet', he feels, is outmoded, derogatory and marginalising, 'a term of dismissal'.[6] Similarly, feeling 'irritated and...confined' by the twin labels of 'woman writer' and 'Scottish writer',[7] Jamie has left them behind - 'deliberately and consciously wanting to change the direction of [her] work'.[8] It is likely that she would resist the limitations of the term 'nature poet' as strongly as Burnside has. 'At the moment,' she recently stated, 'I'm writing a lot 'toward' the natural world'.[9] Jamie is cautious here: using the word 'toward' rather than 'about' is another way of evading labels, and echoes Burnside's expression of a similar distinction, that he is writing 'poems with flowers in them, but they're not *about* flowers'.[10] It is clear that for Burnside and Jamie at least, the idea of the natural world they are exploring in their poetry and other writings is indeed a political 'issue' - with poetry as a 'line of defence'. Questions, more than issues *per se*, are important to Burnside, and, like more overtly 'political' poets such as Tony Harrison, he has frequently used broadsheet newspapers to get his message across. Questions of style and craft are also, he suggests, important if poetry is to be an effective political tool. Burnside admires writers like Mary Oliver, recognising that writing poems which 'ask important questions'

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[6] John Burnside, Interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. n.pag
[7] Daniel O'Rourke (ed.), *Dream State: The New Scottish Poets* (Polygon: Edinburgh, 1994) p.156
[8] Kathleen Jamie interviewed by Lilias Fraser. p.17
[9] Kathleen Jamie. 'Author Statement', *Contemporary Writers Website*. (www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth02C5P102112626707) n.pag. [accessed 12th May 2004]
[10] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. (unpublished transcription) n.pag.

inevitably 'change[s] your relationship to craft'. Burnside is frustrated with the British 'attachment to the craft side of [poetry]' which, he feels, is 'part of the deal that poets shouldn't get too big for their boots, the idea that poetry doesn't change anything and all that'. American writers, by contrast, have been prepared to 'pare...work down' in order to make it 'direct and challenging' and able to communicate to 'as big an audience as possible'.[11] An admirer of environmentally-aware writers such as Gary Snyder or Barry Lopez, Burnside is co-editor of *Wild Reckoning: an anthology of poetry provoked by the work of Rachel Carson*, the author of *Silent Spring*, widely considered the first book to bring the concept of ecology to the public at large. Poems and articles by Burnside regularly appear in *The Guardian* newspaper, with prose polemics against the intrusions of corporate golf in Scottish rural areas or a poem about the noise pollution of a military air base.[12] So when poets like Burnside and Jamie talk about poetry as 'a line of defence', they are not exactly taking up Shelley's argument about poets being 'unacknowledged legislators', but they are suggesting that poetic modes of observation and expression are important for the 'world out there', with important questions to ask about how we live in that world.

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[11] *Ibid.* n.pag.

[12] 'Bunkered by Mr Big', *The Guardian*, 28th July 2001, and 'Base', *The Guardian*, 22nd March 2001.

Kathleen Jamie, like John Burnside, rejects traditional systems of belief, searching for new ways of celebrating and understanding existence.

> I don't believe in God. I believe in spiders, alveoli, starlings... I might suggest that prayer-in-the-world isn't supplication, but the quality of attention we can bring to a task, the intensity of listening, through the instruments we have designed for the purpose. It might be the outermost reaches of the Universe, the innermost changes at the bottom of a lung, the words on a page, or a smear of blood on a slide. I think it's about repairing and maintaining the web of our noticing, a way of being in the world. Or is that worship?[13]

This reverence for details is part of a developing poetic manifesto, a search for ways in which to express 'the true and the good and the sacred' - concepts which she is aware might sound a bit old-fashioned or trite, to some ears. In her essay, 'Holding Fast - Truth and Change in Poetry', Jamie enunciates her fundamental belief that 'A poem is an approach to truth'. This might suggest the transcendent 'eternal truth' pursued by the Romantic poets, or that she is developing a poetic creed based on the importance of external objects, and aligned with scientific observation, provable fact. Neither of these options is quite what Jamie is talking about. Essentially, she is working out a theory of the 'sacred' - a word that seems to hover at the edges of her essay, and something which she is characteristically self-conscious about pinning down. This poetry of 'truth' bears some similarities to the 'poetry of facts' MacDiarmid

[13] Kathleen Jamie. 'Diary'. *London Review of Books*. Vol.24 No.11. 6th June 2002. p.39

wanted to develop, but the exhaustive cataloguing of MacDiarmid's late poetry is not the tool Jamie chooses to employ, despite her fondness for litanies and lists in poems like 'Lucky Bag'. Recognising the complications which might arise from such ideals, poems she says, are often 'witty, quirky and sly... mischievous, tricksterish. Their truths don't sound like the truths of the court-room or inquest'. All this leads her to wonder, 'Can we say...that truth itself is a shape-shifter?'[14] This train of thought steers towards Heidegger's idea of 'truth' as 'dynamic'; that the revelation of truth in a poem or work of art is an active process, open to constant re-interpretation – not a static statement of 'fact'. The poem, as an art-form, is 'an instance of *techne*, of bringing-forth from unconcealment', which is 'not the presentation of a finished product with a determinate significance...but an active bringing-forth, a process of unconcealment'. Suggestions of an active process versus a finished product seems appealing, bringing the reader in from the cold. Ultimately this leads Heidegger to the assertion that 'Truth is un-truth', in that the 'truth' of a poem is not immediately available to the reader.

Heidegger's provocative philosophical stance problematises concepts of truth and representation in ways which are particularly fruitful for all three writers considered here. Blurring the categories of 'truth' and 'untruth' opens up the possibility for a poetry – or prose – which is at

[14] Kathleen Jamie. 'Holding Fast – Truth and Change in Poetry'. *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*. Ed. W.N. Herbert & M. Hollis. Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2000. p.280

once ambiguous and 'shape-shifting' but also mysterious and reverential. Such possibilities are a recurrent topic for meditation in Burnside's poetry and fiction, certainly influenced by his interest in Heidegger and other phenomenological philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard. Paul, the protagonist in Burnside's novel, *The Locust Room*, is a photographer searching for the perfect image, haunted by the tension between perception and revelation. He desires 'a photography of the night, of the gaps between the hidden and the revealed, that would more closely resemble natural history than anything that might be called 'art'.'[15]

> He had his camera
> but couldn't take
> the picture he wanted
> the one he thinks of now
> as perfect
> – he couldn't betray
> that animal silence
> the threadwork of grass through the hide
> the dwelling place
> inherent in the spine[16]

Striking a balance between a flat record of the 'facts' – a concept which Burnside mistrusts – and the self-conscious 'art-form', which is also a distortion of the 'real', is a quest central to much of Burnside's writing. In *The Locust Room*, it leads Paul to develop a theory of 'Orphic' art, which is based on taking an original, unsullied look at the world, 'the essential creative act...of seeing, and making seen, for the first time,

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[15] John Burnside. *The Locust Room*. London: Vintage, 2002. p.8
[16] John Burnside. 'Ports'. *The Asylum Dance*. pp.1-8; p.5

the true nature of the world'[17]. This a reverence for the objects themselves - perhaps the 'quality of attention' which Kathleen Jamie characterises as a form of 'worship'. In her poem, 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead', Jamie finds the contents of a household, the last traces of a life history dumped on the rubbish heap. Her contemplation of the ephemeral nature of these objects, out of their domestic contexts and forlorn on the council rubbish-heap, endows them with a certain numinous aspect. She treats them reverentially, attentively, reading the postcards 'spew[ed]' from the dead woman's 'stiff | old ladies' bags, open mouthed', and projects from the discovery of a puncture repair kit a rich history of rambles in the countryside, evoking:

> those days when he knew intimately
> the thin roads of his country, hedgerows
> hanged with small black brambles' hearts,
> and here, for God's sake, his last few joiners' tools,
> SCOTLAND, SCOTLAND, stamped on their tired handles.[18]

This is an elegy for a Scotland dead and gone, and already being erased from memory. 'Do we take them?' she asks, recognising the inevitable scrap-heap end for these objects, which are symbols for Scotland's past and the limitations which might result from holding on to that past. The 'perfunctory rite' of 'sweeping up' and 'turning out' is a necessary one. Such archaeological contemplations of found objects abound in Jamie's poetry, in poems such as 'The Shoe' or

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[17] *Ibid.* p.175

[18] Kathleen Jamie. 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead'. *The Queen of Sheba.* London: Bloodaxe, 1994. p.37

'Arraheids' - and most recently, 'The Reliquary'. In Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Alma devises 'a life of her own, a secret life hidden in every corner of the house' whose focus is a shrine to her still-born baby, constructed from 'a bowl from a jumble sale; a scrap of bright blue fabric...a child's wax-crayon drawing she had found in the street'. Contemplation of objects may allow for the construction of narratives based on a supposed history of those objects, but may also allow for the viewer or poet to hone their observational skills.

Photography, the ultimate 'Orphic art form'[19] is an art capable of bringing 'us back to the things themselves'[20] - and what enables it to do this is a capacity to make the familiar strange, 'other', 'picturing the world from which all invested meaning had been stripped away, a neutral, and so natural act'.[21]

> they possessed, or were possessed of, that quality of estrangement that seemed to allow the things to move away from the viewer's gaze, to set each thing, each pebble and plank and scab of weed, in its own inviolable space, not as a mere object, but as something respected, something loved and so left to be itself, beyond possession, beyond comprehension.[22]

This is an interpretation of Kant's idea of the 'thing-in-itself', the real, unmediated object, as opposed to the 'thing-for-us'. In *The Locust Room*, Paul's first theory of an ideal photography reveals the 'thing-in-itself' by a process which removes the creative self from the picture,

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[19] John Burnside. *The Locust Room*. p.175
[20] *Ibid.* p.175
[21] *Ibid.* p.176
[22] *Ibid.* p.28

erasing the ego – an ability which Kathleen Jamie admires in Heidegger's favourite poet, Holderlin.[23] This necessary distance facilitates a revelation of 'the no man's land between the real and fantasy – the mystery in the commonplace – the uncommonness of the commonplace' – a concept which has haunted Burnside's writing since the phrase 'the mystery in the commonplace' appeared in his first poetry collection, *The Hoop*.[24] However, as a record of the 'phenomenon of the encounter' which involves 'an awareness...both of the subject and the self' in which 'one almost becomes the other' suggests a more Wordsworthian encounter with the natural object, a continuum between mind and nature in which awareness of the self is necessary to evoke the mystery of the subject. The problem of how human perception always intercedes between self and world provokes, in Burnside's thought, a shift to a philosophy of phenomenology, to the discovery of 'primary virtues' which 'go beyond the problems of description'.[25]

For Burnside, this can also mean paring-down language and the most obvious markers of poetic 'craft' to a bare minimum – something which he admires in American poets such as Mary Oliver.[26] Creating a

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[23] Kathleen Jamie. 'The Questionnaire'. *Poetry Review*. Vol. 92 No. 2 (Summer 2002) p.11

[24] John Burnside. 'Lost', *The Hoop*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1988. p.48

[25] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p.4

[26] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. n.pag.

simplicity which effaces the ego, getting rid of the flourishes which declare the presence of the writer – Coleridge's 'eternal I AM'.

> Interesting poetry, for me, asks questions about the quality of experience. What did you really hear? What did you really see? What did you really taste?... Poems that make us pay attention. Poems with an ecological heart.[27]

The differing potential of the visual arts as opposed to language or poetry to 'reveal' truths about the world is an important issue for Burnside, whose own poetry is itself characterised by a strongly visual, sensuous style. Limitations are discovered in both methods. In the poem, 'Taxonomy', the speaker finds it difficult to describe the precise colour of foliage he is observing, 'nothing like baize | or polished jade', it exists in the 'gap' between one name and another. This 'unknown' aspect of the world is 'looking always worked towards a word: | trading the limits of speech | for the unsaid presence'. Unsaid and unsayable presences abound in Burnside's work, whose acute sense of the mysterious forms the still centre of much of his poetry. Burnside considers the ways in which language is fundamentally limited in evoking the 'real', a mode of representation or exploration which is always provisional or compromised. For Burnside, there is no possibility of complete description or of complete detachment, implying a deeply-held suspicion of pretensions to ideals of precision or accuracy which modern science might claim.

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[27] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. n.pag.

and the magic
that speech performs
is all

continuum: the given and the named
discovered and invented
one more time,

with each new bud or tendril that unfolds
upon the revelation
of the known.[28]

Kathleen Jamie experiences similar descriptive dilemmas. In her book about her travels in Pakistan, *The Golden Peak*, recently reissued with new chapters as *Among Muslims*, Jamie is aware of how important precision and deftness are in literary representations. In describing a Himalayan landscape, she finds nuances of colour and form which demand a thoughtful, considered lyricism:

> There are words we reach for out of habit, like desolate, bare, barren, colourless, but these are not true. There were colours, but subtle, just a breath of pale blues and snow-greys, a smudgy brown denoting a village at the riverside. Above the river and villages, mountains slammed upward, young, hasty, sharp-edged.[29]

Wordsworth's concept of a transcendent 'spirit' forming a continuum between the 'mind of man' and external nature, and the psychological aspect of experience, perception and representation, are issues which are not so easily resolved. Indeed, towards the end of *The Locust Room*, Paul shifts his stance, his original goal of the 'detached observer' is 'an

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[28] John Burnside. 'Taxonomy'. *The Light Trap*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2002. p.7
[29] Kathleen Jamie. *Among Muslims: Meetings at the Frontiers of Pakistan*. London: Sort Of Books, 2002. p.239

improbable fantasy' which is replaced by a quest for a 'form of alchemy... to become a participant, or celebrant, rather than a witness'.[30] Such concepts are the starting point for poems meditating on the theme of 'Habitat' in Burnside's latest poetry collection, *The Light Trap*. The section's epigraph from ecological philosopher, Paul Shepard, suggests the existence of 'something more mutually and functionally independent between mind and terrain, an organic relationship between the environment and the unconscious'.[31] Burnside's protagonist in *The Locust Room* wants to emulate the symbolic creativity of the Orpheus myth, where the god sings animals into existence. Orpheus has long been associated with poetry - particularly lyric poetry - but Burnside's contemplation of the myth deepens the mystery of the continuum between subject, language and object. In the version given in *The Locust Room*, Orpheus's singing liberates the animals from their status as 'mere objects, named and forgotten and shrouded in the contempt bred of familiarity', as they emerge 'alive, shining, made other in the poet's song'. The ambiguities of language or the 'shape-shifter' aspect of poetry seem more likely to be capable of revealing the 'mystery in the commonplace' searched for in *The Locust Room*.

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[30] *Ibid.* p.174
[31] Quoted in John Burnside. *The Light Trap*. p.1

In the poem, 'Sense Data', Burnside invites us to think about the limits of scientific measurement, 'observed migrations, rainfalls, frequencies':

> and somewhere behind it all, in private realms
> of gulls' eggs and stones and things I couldn't name,
>
> another world of charge and borderline,
> an earth-tide in the spine, the nightlong
> guesswork of old voices in the mind.[32]

The vital element of 'guesswork' in a world in which science has taught us to consider quantifiable, nameable and understandable. In *Living Nowhere*, Francis finds another way of seeing the world through the eyes of his friend, Jan. At first, to Francis, the world:

> was a static affair: buildings, steelworks, trees, water, gaps, tracks – everything was given, nothing had history, nothing seemed to change. But you had another way of looking at it all. You subsisted on guesswork; you lived by hypothesis and inference.[33]

In such a world of 'flux', where the world itself is a 'changing text' which must be 'scried', mystery becomes possible. Kathleen Jamie's poem 'Skeins o Geese' evokes this need to 'read' the world: 'Whit dae birds write on the dusk? A word nivir spoken nor read'. [34] This aspect of the 'sacred', most often found in conjunction with meditations on the natural world, is a concept which recurs continually in both Burnside's poetry and prose, and seems allied to Kathleen Jamie's

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[32] John Burnside. 'Sense Date' *The Asylum Dance*, p.12
[33] John Burnside. *Living Nowhere*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2003. p.234
[34] Kathleen Jamie. 'Skeins o Geese'. *The Queen of Sheba*. p.64

search for a heightened, reverential 'quality of attention'. The revelation of such mysteries in Burnside's work, however, seems to depend upon the elision of the self. In his poetic manifesto, 'Strong Words', he argues that 'the lyrical impulse begins at the point of self-forgetting', a freedom which allows creativity, *poesis*, to occur. Effacements of the self, of personal identity and rootedness in place, recur continually in Burnside's fiction, with fantasies of invisibility, disappearance, effacement or estrangement comprising a psychological trait common to many of his characters and personas. In *The Locust Room*, Paul reaches the conclusion that 'estrangement' from society is the route to his concept of the perfect photograph, which is itself a tool he uses to experience an authentic 'being in the world':

> this quality – of estrangement, rather than alienation – was the best asset he had. It was the starting point for a process that led inevitably to invisibility. To care nothing at all for being seen. The grace of the forgotten: the tree that falls in the woods.[35]

Burnside reiterates this point in 'After Lucretius', saying 'nothing matters less | than being seen'.[36] Social invisibility, the 'grace of the forgotten' leads inevitably to a confrontation with conceptions of the 'other' – indeed, it is his chance encounter with a fox on a woodland path which brings about Paul's epiphany. Paul realises that by opting out of the social world, in which he is an outsider anyway, brings him closer to the world of the fox, a world of physical objects which have their own intrinsic mystery. Similarly, in Burnside's latest novel,

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[35] John Burnside. *The Locust Room*. p.28
[36] John Burnside. 'After Lucretius'. *The Light Trap*. p.77

Living Nowhere, disappearing, escaping and being forgotten are experienced as somehow liberating to Francis, another character on the periphery of society. Following the funeral of his murdered friend, Jan, Francis sees a gap in a hedge at the perimeter of the cemetery, and simply walks through it:

> It was the kind of gap animals use, deer coming in from the fields to browse the graveyard roses, foxes following a path they had used for generations, ignoring the lines of human settlement...[37]

Crossing boundaries the way animals do, Francis denies the allegiances of human-defined territories, and in so doing, denies the possibility of 'home'. The hedge is an intriguing borderline, a human marker of territory, as well as a natural habitat - in many ways a liminal space between culture and nature, which Francis must inevitably cross as a rite of passage.

Burnside's fiction meditates on the idea of getting 'clean away', of simply leaving home, with no fidelity to place, family, community or possessions. 'It was a necessary ritual, this process of erasure: I had to become myself again, a non-person, someone with no defined identity, without family or friends, or fixed abode.'[38] In a way, *Living Nowhere* is indeed 'only the story of some | local, who went out one afternoon | and strayed home decades later, | much the same as when he left'.[39]

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[37] John Burnside. *Living Nowhere*. p.234
[38] *Ibid*. p.318
[39] John Burnside. 'After Lucretius'. *The Light Trap*. p.77

At times, it seems that Burnside's male characters are a population of loners, drifters, would-be escapists, searching for an elusive way of 'being in the world'.

> The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.[40]

Exile, in Burnside's novels, is accompanied by a blurring of identity and selfhood - the 'self-forgetting' he contends is necessary for the lyrical act to occur. Such effacements of the self are performed in Burnside's shorter fiction. In 'The Invisible Husband', one of the short stories in *Burning Elvis*, a relationship between husband and wife dissolves when the wife, Laura, having experienced some form of mental breakdown, conjures a phantom husband to replace her real husband. The illusion is seductive, disturbing, and begins inform the real husband's thoughts, breaking down his own sense of identity, producing 'a dizzying sense of myself as imagined, as transient and insubstantial as any ghost', which leads him to reject the entire fabric of his life as illusory, and to leave, effecting 'an escape, not only from the place that had held him for so long, but also from the sheer mass of his life, the bearable pretences of marriage and work and home'.[41] In so doing he is 'searching...for a stillness in his own mind, a new

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[40] Edward Said. 'Reflections on Exile'. *Reflections on Exile and other literary and cultural essays*. London: Granta, 2001. p.454

[41] John Burnside. 'The Invisible Husband'. *Burning Elvis*. p.61

way of being that doesn't involve maintenance'.[42] Similarly, the sinister protagonist of *The Dumb House* toys with the idea of 'becoming someone else', of 'getting into the car and driving away... vanishing from the world I had inhabited all my life'.[43] The 'liberation' of such escapes and self-forgettings perhaps risks what Edward Said described as 'a fetish of exile, a practice that distances [the exiled person] from all connections and commitments. To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial...'[44]

The idea of 'dwelling', which has been employed as an ecological concept in the work of John Burnside and in recent criticism such as Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, is revealed to be a difficult term. Alma, a 'displaced person' who traces her roots back to a shadowy childhood homeland of Latvia, is reminded by her husband of the dual aspect of 'dwelling'. It can mean 'to live, to have a house, to be sheltered, but it also meant this other thing, this dwelling on, this being caught up in something and unable to move on'.[45] It is this second aspect of 'dwelling' which inspires Francis to leave Corby. On the road, he feels both 'at home' and 'joyfully lost', 'free, blown in the wind, unburdened.'[46]

> this is a world where nobody should feel altogether at home, this is a world where no honest person can feel he belongs – or not altogether. In a world like this – not the real, wide world of

[42] *Ibid.* p.63
[43] *The Dumb House.* p.25
[44] Edward Said. 'Reflections on Exile'. p.183
[45] *Living Nowhere.* p. 132
[46] *Ibid.* p.236

> grass and earthquakes and bullfinches, but this world, this human state – grief, and anger, and guilt for that matter, are only natural. Home, wherever and for however long we find it, is, by its very nature, provisional and tainted.[47]

Such impulses might suggest an intrinsic state of exile, following Theodor Adorno's argument, picked up by Edward Said in his important essay, 'Reflections on Exile', that 'dwelling...is now impossible', that our homes 'have grown intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge'[48]. 'The house is past,' Adorno says, and the 'best mode of conduct... [is] an uncommitted, suspended one: to lead a private life, as far as the social order and one's own needs will tolerate nothing else, but not to attach weight to it as something still socially substantial and individually appropriate.... it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.'[49] In *Identifying Poets*, Crawford argues that 'home' is a central concept for modern poetry, with the figure of the 'identifying poet', that is, a poet who explicitly identifies himself or herself with a particular terrain or territory, as a valid and illuminating way of interpreting poetic work. Home, he says, is 'a topic which pervades contemporary verse'[50] and was 'one of the great themes of the poetry of the 1980s...' and, he suggests, is also important in the work of contemporary Scottish writers such as John Burnside and Kathleen Jamie. [51] Reading the former's poetry, Crawford points out that the title of Burnside's

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[47] *Ibid.* p.305
[48] Theodor Adorno, quoted by Edward Said. 'Reflections on Exile'. p.564
[49] *Ibid.* p.565
[50] Robert Crawford. *Identifying Poets.* p.147
[51] *Ibid.* p.153

1991 poetry collection, *Common Knowledge*, was originally to have been *Home*, and that 'the concerns about the uncertainties of identity and homing glimpsed in an explicitly Scottish context in 'Exile's Return' are central to Burnside's imagination'.[52]

But such erasures and disappearances are more than just the escape from social norms and expectations in Burnside's work; they are part of his questioning of the idea of 'home' and 'belonging' which is, for him, one of the central concerns of ecology philosophy. Informed by his reading of Martin Heidegger, Burnside is haunted by the possibilities of 'dwelling', of an authentic way of 'being in the world'. An epigraph from Heidegger appears in his 2000 poetry collection, *The Asylum Dance*. Heidegger suggests that the human condition is one of intrinsic 'homelessness', and that the search for a true home, for a way of 'dwelling' on the earth, is central to human experience.

> The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the proper plight of dwelling as the plight? Yet as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals to their dwelling.[53]

In other words, acknowledging and thinking about the problem brings us closer to authenticity, closer to the possibility of 'home'. I

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[52] *Ibid.* p.147
[53] Epigraph, *The Asylum Dance.*

would like to argue that this ecological philosophy of 'home' is what John Burnside has been pursuing throughout his literary career. My point here is that 'home', for contemporary Scottish writers, has taken on new meanings, beyond the questions of 'nationalism' or 'Scottishness'. 'Home' is not only about that sort of political allegiance anymore. Burnside writes that he is seeking a 'view of identity that sets terrain and habitat before tribal allegiance', admitting that his 'natural influence' is probably 'an anarchist influence. I don't really want to belong to a country. I want to belong to a local community, to a region.'[54] This is a different concept of 'home' than, say, Stevenson wrote about when he was missing Scotland.

Alan Warner is a Highland novelist who, despite knowing and admiring Iain Crichton Smith, has more often been associated with the urban counter-cultural novelists of the 1990s such as Irvine Welsh. His most recent novel, *The Man Who Walks*, considers the motives behind travel and outlooks on home. 'We are not always travelling to places, often we are escaping,' the mysterious Man Who Walks writes: 'Anschluss and exodus are the common movements of our time'.[55] As if in defiance of the rejection the Nephew experiences from the West Coast 'Settled Community', he describes a community of pan-European tree-dwelling gypsies, 'old ladies who made tea for me up in their tree houses', their grandchildren at the fiestas, 'dancing all

[54] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March, 2004.
[55] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks*. London: Vintage, 2003. p.105

night, and leaping through the bonfires with crowns of jasmine'.[56] Whether or not this idyll is a fiction, like the wandering narratives of his Uncle, discovered inscribed on a tangle of typewriter ribbon, is not clear - and it is notable that such reveries tend to occur under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Such possibilities are under threat, however, with the old travelling ways of life dying out. Realising this, the Nephew wonders if 'The Man Who Walks is the only traveller walking under these purple, then dark skies?'[57] But travel is also something to be suspicious of.

> We should all be sick of it. Always moving from A to B. Only a legacy of worn boots. The longing just for stillness. Eyes rest on nothing long enough for meditation upon it. We go through those gateways of transformation: airports; and we come back unchanged. When did travel last change someone? In what century?[58]

The Nephew himself entertains fantasies of escape, however: 'what a place, the Nephew thought, if only I could get out. To where? I'll tell you where: to some place proper, if only!' At other times the Nephew claims that we 'should despise and distrust travel' - and it seems that it is the secular, tawdry aspect of modern travel to which he objects, complaining that 'travel has to be a fetish and mystified and sold and finally trivialised'.[59] Touristic, modern travel deletes the possibility of a 'rite of passage' or a pilgrimage.

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[56] *Ibid.* p.189
[57] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks.* p.190
[58] *Ibid.* p.189
[59] *Ibid.* p.191-192

Crawford suggests that one problem with home is that it is sometimes 'smug' and 'constricting', and that 'the poetic celebrants of home at the moment tend not to be women'.[60] The constrictions of home might be a motive for Kathleen Jamie's writings of travel – and indeed, the tension between the desire to be on the road and the expectations of gender (home, babies, a settled life) are explored in both her travel writings, *The Golden Peak* and later, *Among Muslims*, as well as her poetry.

> I could have children, and maybe no worries. But I was a person walking down a track in Baltistan all alone on a Wednesday morning. I was capable; and sometimes, a glimpse of what we could be opens in our minds like the fearsome blue crevasses I'd seen on glaciers. I could be a person who lives here...a wandering monkish figure gone native.[61]

Turning into the mother of 'Wee Baby' or the domestic persona of 'Wee Wifey' – poems which feature in her collection, *The Queen of Sheba* – seems incongruous with the mirage of Jamie as a 'wandering monkish figure' which hovers on the edge of possibility. To be a permanent wanderer would mean 'forgoing the children, and the shadowy figure that filled the vacuum when they asked, 'Where is your husband?''[62] 'Wee Baby' speaks of this dilemma, a 'glimpse' of the possibility of pregnancy which follows her around. At home or abroad, the baby is a choice yet to be made: 'She blows about the desert in a sand-pram, | O traveller' since 'the kingdom of Wee Baby

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[60] *Ibid.* p.144
[61] Kathleen Jamie. *Among Muslims.* p.210
[62] *Ibid.* p.210

is within'.[63] Similarly, domesticity becomes internalised and personified by 'Wee Wifey', who exists 'in the household of my skull', constricting and infuriating at times, but 'sad to note | that without | WEE WIFEY | I shall live long and lonely as a tossing cork'.[64] These are issues which also confront male wanderers, as Francis in *Living Nowhere* is met with questions about his unmarried, childless state, returning home after twenty years' absence, 'both son and stranger'.[65]

There are aspects of home which retain a distinctive Scottish accent in Jamie's work, considered in the soft cadences of Scots, but she makes it clear that her own concerns about home and family life, phrased in Scots words in her poetry, extend to the women she meets on her travels, saying in *Among Muslims* that the duty of a travel-writer 'is to our common humanity. Travel-writing is less about place than people, it describes people's lives'.[66] But travel itself is undertaken for more complex reasons, part of the tension between home and the search for somewhere else which Stevenson and others experienced a century ago. The impulse to travel while at home is suggested from the 'Twitter of swallows and swifts: | *'tickets and visas, visas and tickets''* while, wandering abroad, ideas of home seem an inextricable part of consciousness. Such glimpses of home on the road are given by a lapse into a soft, sibilant Scots:

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[63] Kathleen Jamie. 'Wee Baby', *The Queen of Sheba* p. 29
[64] Kathleen Jamie. 'Wee Wifey', *The Queen of Sheba.* p.30
[65] John Burnside. *Living Nowhere.* p.341
[66] Kathleen Jamie. *Among Muslims.* p.227

> Sits a lassie in red scarf,
> wi her heid in her hauns, her heid
> achin wi the weicht o so much saun
> the weicht o the desert that waits every morn
> an blackly dogs her back.[67]

Jamie, identifying with two historical characters on her journeys across Tibet and China, speaks for herself as much as for them, 'on a suddenty mindit: A'm far fae hame, | I hae crossed China'.[68] Home, viewed from afar, becomes more desirable.

The equivocal idea of home is played out to its fullest extent in Burnside's poetry. A recurrent motif in Burnside's work is the elemental erasure of the ordinary human world which compasses everyday life, othered by the action of fog, snow, even darkness. In 'Lost', 'home was unremarkable until | it disappeared into the hinterland | behind our practised blindness'.[69] Similarly, in Burnside's prose poems, 'Suburbs' in *Common Knowledge*, night changes the daytime identity of the suburb and in doing so, destabilises the secure 'commonplace' aspect of everyday life. At night,

> the garden is stolen by foxes rooting in turned dustbins, emptiness takes form and approaches from the centre of the lawn, a white devil, smiling out of the dark, and the realisation dawns that I live in an invented place whose only purpose is avoidance, and what I would avoid, I carry with me, always.[70]

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[67] Kathleen Jamie. 'The Autonomous Region', *Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead: Poems, 1980-1994*. Selected by Lilias Fraser. (Northumberland, Bloodaxe: 2002) p.86
[68] *Ibid.* p.106
[69] John Burnside. 'Lost'. The Hoop. p.48
[70] 'Suburbs', *Common Knowledge*. p.41

The suburbs may appear as an illusory, artificial place, constructed to avoid the question of 'dwelling' and creating some sort of 'non-place', or 'nowhere'. Marc Auge has suggested that there is a difference between what used to be called 'modernity', the 'willed coexistence of two different worlds...chimneys alongside spires'[71] which Baudelaire explored in his poetry, and what might be called 'supermodernity' in which 'the individual consciousness' is subjected to 'ordeals of solitude, directly linked with the appearance and proliferation of non-places'.[72] Non-places are what 'we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge'[73] which inscribe the individual with a commodified meaning, becoming 'no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver'.[74] 'The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, similitude'.[75] Non-places, in other words, conspire in a super-modern culture of identity loss which is a solitary experience, an effacement of self which is not the same thing as Baudelaire's anonymous flâneur or man-of-the-crowd.

Although the simplistic categorisation of such spaces as 'non-places' would likely be denigrated by attentive, observant poets like Jamie

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[71] Marc Auge. *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London: Verso, 1995. p.92
[72] *Ibid.* p.93
[73] *Ibid.* p.96
[74] *Ibid.* p.103
[75] *Ibid.* p.103

and Burnside, this concept of the 'non-place' seems relevant to Burnside's portrayal of suburbia. Liminal spaces are the location for much of Burnside's poems. The permeable, porous aspect of the suburbs is what haunts Burnside; the suburb is a buffer zone or liminal space between the urban and the rural, 'where everything is implied: city, warehouse district, night stop, woods emerging from mist'. This metamorphic status is what confers its non-identity, making it a 'nowhere' and suggesting to the inhabitants 'that nothing is solid at all, and the suburb is no more substantial than a mirage in a blizzard'.[76] The inauthenticity of this way of living is far from the ecological ideal of 'dwelling'. Burnside explores the possibility that this sort of settlement is in fact a form of escapism, of 'avoidance', running away from the emptiness at the heart of a modern life which separates itself from the authentic, natural world. The speaker acknowledges the home-like aspects of living in these suburban houses, the 'primitive identity' of the place which allows some gestures towards authentic 'dwelling': the ability to cultivate plants, or the pleasure in sitting undisturbed in its 'warm kitchen'. Such gestures are part of this concept of a 'primitive identity' which echoes the phenomenological 'primary virtues' or 'original shell' of inhabiting which Bachelard tries to uncover *in The Poetics of Space*.[77] However, in these poems at least, such intimations of normal inhabitance seem merely to be part of a well-constructed illusion.

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[76] *Ibid.* p.42
[77] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space.* p.4

Similar anxieties about authenticity and artificiality appear in Kathleen Jamie's poetry. In 'Fountain', she asks 'What are we doing when we toss a coin, | just a 5p piece into the shallow dish | of the fountain in the city-centre | shopping arcade?' Thinking about the irony of shop-names like 'Athena, Argos, Olympus' and the modern reality of women laden with polythene bags sipping 'coffee in...polystyrene cup[s]' she says, 'We know it's all false'. But Jamie's ironic, playful viewpoint remains optimistic, offering the tantalising possibility of a re-connection with some ancient tradition, some dislocated pagan sensibility:

> A wee stroke of luck? A something else, a nod
> toward a goddess we almost sense
> in the verdant plastic? Who says
> we can't respond; don't still feel,
> as it were, the dowser's twitch
> up through the twin handles of the buggy.[78]

Plugging in to some vestige of the authentic, of the 'real', is a paramount concern for both writers. Ideals of authenticity, in Burnside especially, are related to the philosophy of Existentialism, which developed as a reaction to modernity, and stressed the importance of 'authentic' life, as opposed to the 'bad faith' of the masses, or the 'herd', as Nietszche called them. There are, perhaps, implicit suggestions of superiority in such a doctrine of authenticity - although Kathleen Jamie's work, which focuses on the democratic

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[78] Kathleen Jamie. *The Queen of Sheba*. p.17

voice as much as the importance of an individual, solitary relationship with the world, might be exempt from such an analysis. John Burnside's work, on the other hand, does contain traces of suspicion or derision for the 'masses'. However, following the birth of his son, there is a subtle adjustment in Burnside's work, which becomes concerned not only with how he as an individual is to relate to the natural world around him, but how his son can enjoy and understand that world. Kite-flying, for Burnside, has some elements of the 'dowser's twitch'. The poem, 'History' meditates on 'the problem: how to be alive | in all this gazed-upon and cherished world | and do no harm'. Written in the aftermath of September 11th 2001, Burnside finds himself 'dizzy with the fear | of losing everything - the sea, the sky, | all living creatures, forests, estuaries.' The toddler on the beach represents an innocent way of seeing the world, 'puzzled by the pattern on a shell', their different ways of exploring and experiencing the 'other' that is the natural world allows for some hope:

> his parents on the dune slacks with a kite
> plugged into the sky
> all nerve and line
>
> patient; afraid; but still, through everything
> attentive to the irredeemable.[79]

Kite-flying is also a motif in *The Locust Room*, which Paul's father uses as a means of mediation between self and nature, discovering a sense of belonging through the physical engagement with the sky, ' a subtle,

[79] *The Light Trap*. p.42

responsive thing, like skin'. 'It was a correspondence, of sorts, a kind of dialogue. Sometimes, he would think that the sky was the only thing to which he was certain he belonged.'[80] This way of 'plugging in' to the natural world is predicated not on sight but on bodily sensation 'it all had to do with feeling, with tension and movement flowing back through the nerves and into the spine and the belly.'[81] The search for such methods of mediation is a central theme in *Living Nowhere*, Burnside's latest novel, and his most explicitly 'ecological' prose work to date. At first set in the industrial, polluted environment of Corby, the novel falls into four sections, corresponding to the four ancient 'elements' - 'The Perfection of Water', 'Keeping Fire', 'The Air of the Door' and 'Earth Light'. The title of the novel is itself ambiguous, suggesting both pessimism and idealism - 'nowhere' resonates with connotations of utopia, literally 'nowhere', perhaps recalling the idealistic, anti-industrial future imagined in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. The 'nowhere' of the northern industrial town, however, is closer to purgatory than to any utopian idyll. The inhabitants of the town find themselves 'steeped in a miasma of steel and carbon and ore...drenched in the stink of coke and ammonia and that lingering undertow, part-carbon, part-iron, that was everywhere - in the soil and the water, on the air...in the flesh of the living and the bones of the dead'. [82] Corby suffers from some of the same problems that the 'non-place' of the suburbs faces, with half-hearted attempts by the

[80] *The Locust Room*. p.235
[81] *Ibid*. p.235
[82] *Living Nowhere*. pp.13-14

planners to keep a few elements of nature in the industrial landscape, leaving room for 'narrow strips of dusty woods, mysterious angles and recesses of greenery and brackish water'. These areas fail in their intention to prettify the town, instead 'reminding everyone of what had been there before The Works arrived'; 'remnants of ancient forest, the dusty ghosts of what had once been clear ponds and rivers full of carp or pike, occasional clumps of wildflowers in woodland clearings, their blossoms impossibly blue, or gold, or blood-red'.[83]

Children and adults alike dream of alternative homes, away from Corby. 'People here were always talking about home, and they always meant some other place, somewhere in the past or the future, a place they had come from, a place they were going to.'[84] Home is never the 'here and now' for the residents of Corby, but a 'home' they fondly remember from childhood or a destination they fantasise about retiring to. Their children realise what they do not, that 'the mythical communities they dreamed about were just estates and tenements', places no different from Corby, except that they now existed in the mind, idealised.[85] Younger characters like Alina, Francis or Derek dream of escapes, possible lives which are not rooted in memories of elsewhere. Such dreams are known to be unreal, but in this case it is the value of imagination itself that is prized:

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[83] *Ibid.* p.13
[84] *Ibid.* p.13
[85] *Ibid.* p.109

> All that mattered was that she could imagine somewhere outside this smoky, poisoned town: light; empty woods; deer crossing a country road in the dusk. This imagined place, this country which did not exist, was *home* for her.[86]

It seems that escape to a conceptual dwelling place, a place which can only be inhabited by the mind, is the only 'true' habitation possible in this novel. If exile can be viewed as an internalised condition, a state of mind, then perhaps 'home' is too. Alina discovers a way of plugging herself in to the world around her first by using acid, recognising what Bachelard would call the 'primary essence' of the objects around her, which confers upon them a sense of magic, of numinosity. An apple tree in someone's garden is revealed, to Alina's altered mental state, as 'bedecked with tiny golden apples that seemed lit from within, lit and warm, still alive, the seeds still liquid in the sleeping core'. The drug use allows her to recognise how much she 'belongs' to her body, how much it is possible to feel 'at home' in the body - a sensation which returns when she later walks out onto a frozen lake, heading for the 'vivid white space', a 'magical zone' at its centre. Walking on the ice, her senses are heightened, noticing:

> her breath going in and out like this: the world, herself, the world, warmth and cold and warmth again, a constant measured exchange till it was impossible to say where one thing ended and the other began. A body in the world, breathing. A centre of balance, a breath of air.[87]

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[86] *Ibid.* p.13
[87] *Ibid.* p.39

This breakdown of self/other or subject/object relationships is important, positing the possibility of a continuum, a 'world that was continuous with her body'.[88] In 'Strong Words' John Burnside writes of the subjects which he finds particularly interesting:

> what is 'real' (as opposed to merely factual, i.e. 'true'); what is the relationship between self and other (and why do we feel obliged to make such a distinction); and what do we mean when we talk about the spirit.[89]

Thinking about 'self' and 'other', as Foucault demonstrated in *The Order of Things*, is predicated upon taxonomies, systems of linguistic categorisation that divide the perceived world into distinctive, comprehensible objects. However, such systems, the 'ordered surfaces...with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things' are liable to collapse, threatening to disintegrate the 'age-old distinction between the Same and the Other'.[90] Western thought has for centuries promoted the idea of a 'world of the clear and trenchant distinction between what is and what is not', which, it has been suggested, has sidelined mysticism and poetry into a 'subsidiary, clandestine and diminished life'.[91] In defiance of this, poetry 'not only proclaims the dynamic and necessary co-existence of opposites, but also their ultimate identity'.[92] This

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[88] *Ibid.* p.40
[89] 'Strong Words'. p.259
[90] Michel Foucault. 'The Order of Things'. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan. London: Blackwell, 1998. pp.377-378
[91] Octavio Paz, quoted in David Halliburton. *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1981. p.20
[92] *Ibid.* p.19

potential for poetry – and poetic prose – to negotiate the boundaries of categorisation is important for Burnside, as it is for Jamie and Warner. Such boundaries are constantly collapsed or rendered ambiguous in these writers' representations of individuals and the natural world, with all three writers recognising the most fundamental construction of 'Other' as the natural world itself. By deliberately blurring the gaps between 'self' and 'other', 'human' and 'nature', Burnside invites the reader to join him in deconstructing these binary oppositions, which he feels are misleading and constrictive, exploring the liminal world which exists at the edges of such categories.

The 'liminal' or the 'borderline' has long been an important concept for post-colonial theory, giving a voice to the marginalised racial or geographical 'other', and it is clear that a similar process can be applied to the natural world, which has been similarly marginalised, exploited or 'spoken for' in modern Western societies. Burnside is certainly aware of these theoretical implications, pointing out the correspondences between ecological theory and the post-structuralist discourses of postcolonialism and feminism.[93] The social anthropologist Victor Turner theorised that 'liminal people fall in the interstices of the social structure, are on its margins, or occupy its lowest rungs', and that they are often associated with death, or the underworld. Burnside's depiction of the relationship between Francis and Jan in his most recent novel, *Living Nowhere*, plays upon such

[93] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004.

constructions. Jan's death is certainly the catalyst for Francis' abandonment of his previous life, and following his exit through the cemetery hedge, the remainder of the novel takes the form of an autobiographical narrative, comprising a series of letters written by Francis to his dead friend. Jan is in many respects a sort of ethereal 'twin' for Francis, and the relationship between the two friends displaces Francis' real brother, Derek. Jan chooses to opt out of normal social interaction, providing the 'alchemy of studied absence' to family snapshots, 'a blur at the edge of the picture like snowfall ... he was the boy who never existed, the boy who spent his free time with phantoms'. [94] After his death, his presence continues to haunt Francis, becoming the conceptual or spiritual 'brother' Francis confides in, writing a series of letters to his dead friend but never writing home to his family in Corby.

The 'double' or 'doppelgänger' has certainly been a recurring motif in the work of Scottish writers - James Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and R.L. Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* are two striking examples. Burnside's work is full of strange twinnings, relationships between real and imagined brothers, distorted versions of the self which seem to be both psychological and mysteriously 'organic'. Cases 'of wolf-boys, calf-children, infants raised by gazelles, pigs, bears and leopards'[95] are contemplated in *The Dumb House*, whilst Paul encounters a

[94] *Living Nowhere*. p.57
[95] *The Dumb House*. p.30

mysterious, fierce boy in the woods keeping watch over birds' nests in *The Locust Room*.[96]

> That one day I spent in the woods, digging leaf-mould: I kept finding thin silvery threads of mildew that dissolved in the air, and I was sure, if I dug a few inches deeper, I would find a being which resembled me in every way, except that it would be white and etiolated, like a finger of bindweed growing under stone.[97]

In 'Heatwave', the awakening sexuality of a boy watching a woman bathe in the river manifests itself as 'a darker presence, rising from the stream, | to match my every move, my every breath. | Eel black and cold'. Elsewhere, Burnside contemplates fairytales of metamorphosis, the frog in which he sees 'another self: | the changeling I might have been'[98]. In the poems, 'Animism' and 'Animals' in *The Light Trap*, we discover the animal half-life of houses which 'contained a presence' , 'a kindred shape | more animal than ghost'. Inhabitants wake up to discover 'a slickness of musk and fur | on our sleep-washed skins' which suggests 'not the continuity we understand | as self, but life, beyond the life we live | on purpose'.[99] Individual psychology is necessarily part of this perception, as when one of the characters in *The Locust Room* suffers some form of mental breakdown, encountering a indeterminate figure, who looks like 'he belonged to the woods', not 'even a man at all, but something else...he had risen

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[96] *The Locust Room*. p.59
[97] John Burnside. 'Aphasia in Childhood'. p.8
[98] 'Frog', *Feast Days*. p.34
[99] 'Animals', *The Light Trap*. pp.18-19

up out of the earth one day, like those people in fairy stories', his clothes that 'might have been part of his body...made of fur or hair'.[100]

This borderland between self and other, human and nature is, however, morally ambiguous, belonging as much to the rapist in *The Locust Room* as it does to the sensitive personas of Burnside's poetry. The masked rapist reveals a close, intuitive relationship with some kinds of animals - he identifies with stealthy or vicious hunters, realising 'he should have been an animal - a polecat or a wolverine'. What he senses is not the subject-object relationship which might exist between an owner and his pet, but 'something closer and, at the same time, more respectful: a recognition; more of a secret kinship than an understanding.' Part of this animal identity leads to a sense of 'dwelling' on the margins of human life, belonging 'to that borderline of cool air at the window, to the half-life of greenery and rain... to the places that other people treated as dead space, to attics and stairwells and narrow rooms at the back of the house.'[101] There do indeed appear to be a clutch of images and ideas which Burnside returns to again and again, in both his prose and his poetry: twins, liminal spaces, strange encounters with wild animals, points at which the environment and the self fade in or out, and intermingle.

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[100] *The Locust Room*. p.157
[101] *Ibid*. pp.1-2

The liminal, alchemical processes of poetry - or poetic prose - extend to the shifting boundaries between self and other. 'The Myth of the Twin', the title poem of Burnside's fourth collection, the speaker is aware of some presence mirroring the human:

> and say it was out there, out in the snow
> meshed with the birdsong and light
> the way things are real: a blackbird, a scribble of thorns,
> a quickening into the moment, the present tense,
>
> and the way that a stumbling or sudden
> rooting in authenticity is not
> the revelation of a foreign place,
> but emptiness, a stillness in the frost,
> the silence that stands in the birchwoods, the common
> soul.[102]

The experience of the unnameable 'other' provokes, as in *Living Nowhere*, a sense of continuum between self and world, a 'common soul'. A more concrete encounter with the 'other' is evoked in 'September evening; deer at Big Basin', a poem which bears some resemblances to MacDiarmid's 'In Talk with Duncan Ban MacIntyre' or Iain Crichton Smith's 'Deer on the High Hills':

> how these deer are moving in the dark,
> bound to the silence, finding our scent in their way
> and making us strange, making us all that we are
> in the fall of the light[103]

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[102] John Burnside. 'The Myth of the Twin'. *The Myth of the Twin*. Cape: London, 1994. p.53

[103] 'September Evening; Deer at Big Basin', *The Myth of the Twin*, p.38

This encounter conveys the unexpected 'gift of an alien country', 'a story that gives us the questions we wanted to ask, | and a sense of our presence as creatures, | about to be touched.' Being able to acknowledge 'our presence as creatures' is important to Burnside's ecological philosophy. Gaston Bachelard, in *La Flamme d'une Chandelle* (1961) produced a series of 'reveries' on subject-object relationships which tackled this very idea, of humans as 'creatures'. In his 'reveries', Bachelard attempts to deal with the 'convenient passivity' of modern life which sees subject-object relationships in terms of a hierarchy of utility. To reiterate Bachelard's example, a lamp is now operated by the flick of an electric light switch, and the light produced with almost no participation from the person who switches it on, whereas previously the lighting of a candle invited a more creative, meaningful relationship between subject and object. Poetry, Bachelard argues, can 'restore us to the object' and in so doing, it can 'restore to us this sense of ourselves as "creatures", as subjects beyond the conventional limits of subject and object'.[104] Burnside's poems are often wistful meditations on the possibility of such metamorphosis.

> ... if I could have chosen anything
> but this inevitable self, I'd be the one
> who walks alone and barefoot in the woods
> to stand, amidst a family of deer,
> knowing her kind, and knowing the chasm between
> one presence and the next as nothing more
> than something learned, like memory, or song.[105]

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[104] Gaston Bachelard, quoted by Mary McAllester Jones in *Gaston Bahelard, Subversive Humanist: Texts and Readings*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. p.157

[105] John Burnside. 'Deer'. *The Light Trap*. pp.10-11

Kathleen Jamie's work also attempts to break down such binary constructions, but in a more celebratory, playful way, focused on aspects of gender, in the figure of 'The Bogie Wife' from *Jizzen*, or 'Bairns of Suzie: a hex' in *The Queen of Sheba*. In doing so, she capitalises on what once were marginalising constructions of feminine identity - the cultural categories of woman/nature/object/other which feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous have identified. Jamie's poetry explores some concepts drawn from 'ecofeminism', which posits a continuum between the 'body of nature' and female bodies - similarly 'othered' by Western culture, aligned with the moral ambiguities of nature, wildness, sexuality. 'Bairns of Suzie' evokes a female kinship with the natural world, opposed to structures of male authority and control:

> Have you not seen us, the Bairns of Suzie
> under the pylons of Ormiston Brae
> running easy
> with foxes and dogs, high
> on the green hill, high
> in the luke-warm mother's glance
> of midwinter sun?[106]

Land rights for local people, the freedom to wander at will over the landscape, are guarded by a feminised, pagan genius loci, Suzie 'the witch of this hill', identified with some form of earth mother whose children 'come out to play | on the stone nipple | of the Black Craig'.

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[106] Kathleen Jamie. 'Bairns of Suzie: a hex'. *The Queen of Sheba*. pp.25-26

As borderline creatures, the bairns have hybrid characteristics, part-human, part-woodland, crafting charmed arrows with their 'twig fingers', 'laughing like jackdaws'. 'Open-legged', 'dog-rose | tangled | in the hair-nests | of each other's armpits and sex', they are emblems of fecundity, representative of a liberated sexuality which subverts masculine authority, the 'laws and guns, | who'd take this hill, | shake in the people's faces keys | to courtrooms and gates'. The local people, the 'wifies in scarves' at the corner-shop are complicit in this rebellion:

> But they will shake their douce heads,
> old seed heads
> the keys of larch and rowan berries shaking
> and point in different directions
> each to their own home[107]

Their houses have been constructed 'from the Abbey and the Grand Castle | ruined utterly | at the town's edge' - symbolic of the popular defiance of such patriarchal structures of control, whose grand stones have been reappropriated as 'lintels, thexstanes, hearth', the touchstones of 'home'. In *Jizzen*, 'The Bogie Wife' and 'The Green Woman' similarly play with gender/nature constructions. The monstrous 'Bogie Wife', whose hands are 'stained brown as dung', and 'arms, strong as plum-boughs | twisting into fruit', is a blurred category, a hybrid who is both monster and woman - a 'yeti', 'one eye swivelling in the middle of her forehead' but 'charming when

[108] *Ibid.* p.26

cornered' and, with a touch of humour, triumphantly wearing 'attractive batik trousers'. In 'The Green Woman' Jamie explores what it is like to be a new mother. 'Until we're restored to ourselves | by weaning, the skin jade | only where it's hidden under jewellery', the experience is 'suggestive of the lush | ditch' or 'an ordeal', testing out the strength of her female identity, like a witch 'tied to a ducking-stool'.

Altogether, *Jizzen*, which appeared in 1999, is an exploration of aspects of womanhood which revolve around pregnancy, motherhood and creativity, with strong references to felt correspondences between female experience and the natural world. In 'Ultrasound', lyrics reflecting on pregnancy and motherhood, Jamie reveals that on coming home from the hospital with her new-born,

> I had to walk to the top of the garden,
> to touch, in a complicit
> homage of equals, the spiral
> trunks of our plum trees, the moss,
> the robin's roost in the holly.[108]

Self and other are often linked in the context of transformational spaces, particularly water. In the poem, 'The sea-house', Jamie reveals an 'othered' domestic environment, an underwater house where everyday domestic objects and spaces become strange and beautiful: 'the cupboard | under the stair | glimmers with pearl', while

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[108] Kathleen Jamie. 'Ultrasound'. *Jizzen*. p.13

billowing through the house are 'laundries of wrack'. This poem brings constructions of home, gender and nature together in surprising ways.

> The sea-house is purdah:
> cormorants' hooked-out wings
> screen every chamber. Inside
> the shifting place, the
> neither-nor[109]

This liminal place is a feminised space, in 'Purdah', it is a house of women, a distorted domestic scene. The 'shifting place, the | neither-nor' reflects a blurring of identity, of self and other. In 'St Bride's', written about the birth of her daughter, she reflects on 'women's work: folding | and unfolding, be it linen or a selkie- | skin tucked behind a rock'. The imagery, drawn from the natural world, goes through a series of metamorphoses, identifying with 'the hare in jizzen', then 'adders uncoil into spring' and finally, the placenta 'like a fist of purple kelp'. Such images are echoed in 'The Glass-hulled Boat', where jellyfish appear as 'mauve-fringed, luminous bowls | like lost internal organs, | pulsing and slow.' In his poem, 'Women', Burnside also invokes the mystery of the sea with stories of 'mermaids who slipped their skins | and came into the human' – echoing ancient tales of the selkie, or seal-woman, common to island communities throughout the British Isles. In this poem, as in Jamie's, the familiar domestic is revealed as something 'other'. The homes Burnside

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[109] Kathleen Jamie. 'The sea-house'. *The Queen of Sheba*. p.57

imagines these women create involve 'faery gardens silted in the mind | undrinkable liquors glinting on the shelves | in basements, wrapped in verdigris' – gardens, shelves and basements the familiar territory of the domestic scene 'othered' by the mysterious female presences of the hybrid women.

> And women are moving still
> in the rooms of the sea,
> perhaps of their own volition, perhaps with the tide.[110]

In Alan Warner's fiction, Morvern's dive 'beneath the nightwater' from the sinking ferry in *These Demented Lands*, a little girl in her arms, performs a similar liminal function. Entry to the cold waters confuses Morvern's senses, the water turning 'the little blonde girl's (girls?) hair jet-black'. Mysterious, confusing, the phosphorescence under the waters of the Sound creates an other-worldly landscape, 'glissanding on the lunar seabeds way below', Morvern sees her own body as strange, her 'black legs slowly kicking so thin in silhouette' against the backdrop of 'a coral reef gone insane in the colours of these killing seas'. Morvern is haunted by a fear of the ocean, telling the Aircrash Investigator of the 'scaredness' she experienced thinking of ships' rudders displayed in a museum, 'held there forever, punished above the cold Atlantic seabeds that were always rolling out below them.' The Aircrash Investigator recognises the fear of the liminal, the 'other', which Morvern experiences:

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[110] John Burnside. 'Women'. *Feast Days*. p.16

> You fear underworlds where the seabed is the earth, the unsteady surface a new sky, you hate the Living Things: basking shark or angler fish that might brush against your bare leg and those rudders and propellers... their constant immersion, made them thresholds into that underworld.[111]

But both Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator are drawn to these underworlds, the latter obsessed with the wreckage of an aircraft sunken in the bay. This obsession is itself a kind of search for a home, the type of sensation Burnside evokes in 'Ports':

> We notice how dark it is
> a dwelling place
> for something in ourselves that understands
>
> the beauty of wreckage
> the beauty
> of things submerged.[112]

The distortions of what might be 'home' are taken literally in Alan Warner's *The Man Who Walks*, haunted by the liminal, ambiguous figure of the Uncle, the Man Who Walks himself, who can be perhaps be read as much a part of the realm of the natural world as human society. His house is no longer a place of normal human habitation, transformed by neglect into something which resembles the 'lair' of some animal. 'The garden was not kept with accuracy. There was no differences [sic] between the scrub around the house and the actual garden when it began, so long since the fence had rotted away'[113]. This

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[111] Alan Warner. *These Demented Lands*. London: Vintage, 1998. p.85
[112] John Burnside. 'Ports'. *The Asylum Dance*. p.2
[113] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks*. p.35

blurring of boundaries continues inside the house, where the domestic scene is made even more strange by a 'complex network of papier-mâché tunnels and igloos' which Man Who Walks has constructed from old newspapers, a labyrinthine 'badger's sett' inside the rooms and corridors.[114] The Man Who Walks' inhabitation of the house renders it uninhabitable by normal human standards, transformed into a sort of 'lair'. This occupancy is punctuated by periods of time spent wandering the hills, living in caves or sleeping rough using a child's Wendy house as a tent.[115]

> It is a fact Man Who Walks once walked across silty beds of New Loch, 'neath the surface, a huge boulder under one arm holding him down, breathing through a giant hogweed stalk; suffering no such side effects as the bends or, unfortunately, drowning.[116]

The crossing of boundaries, or of transformational spaces such as these, provide a context in which to question the relationship between humans and nature, self and other. Physically uninhabitable, they nevertheless constitute conceptual dwelling places. As Warner sets about deconstructing ideas of 'house' and 'home', he also enacts the deconstruction of 'self', showing the body to be literally invaded by exterior objects, particularly those drawn from the natural world. The Uncle's body is a ruptured construct, his face is in ruins; one of his eyes lost either by violent removal by his Nephew, or his habit of 'breenging around mentally in woodlands...licking rare fungus off

[114] *Ibid.* p.37
[115] *Ibid.* p.92
[116] *Ibid.* p.19

trees'.[117] His jaw was, he claims, broken when he was 'hit by a ship's anchor' (possibly during one of his underwater excursions?), giving him a gaping, 'twisted smile'[118] from which grows a tomato plant, rooted in a rotten molar which he 'chew[s]...once a fortnight to get his greens'.[119] His empty eye socket is used to store objects found on his travels, a 'miniature key-ring torch...switched to the ON position' lighting up 'little fragments of red, yellow and green glass, which cluster like large fish eggs in his eye'.[120]

> Face of The Man Who Walks! Baseball cap gone. The hair! Leaves and dead crabs in its grey spiked heights. Constant appearance of shock, dirt in the wrinkles, the haunted, prowling expression, already dark skin, weathered by the endlessness of being forced abroad in all weathers into the wider expanses of the territory.[121]

This fragmentation of the self is accompanied by a conscious rejection of forms of official identification or classification. The Uncle has destroyed the typical markers of identity conferred upon the individual by the state, choosing to be an outsider. At some point in his life, it seems, 'he spun right out of society, burned his treasured wage slips, national insurance number, premium bonds, driving licence and took to scrambling his papier-mâché tunnels in rustling spurts.'[122] This deliberate rejection of settled life, of the ideals of the

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[117] *Ibid.* p.210
[118] *Ibid.* p.109
[119] *Ibid.* p.103
[120] *Ibid.* p.123
[121] *Ibid.* p.273
[122] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks.* p.237

'Settled Community' reveals both Uncle and Nephew as practitioners of an existence predicated on survival instinct and local knowledge.

It is striking that the epigraphs to Warner's latest novel include Walter Benjamin's famous saying, from his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, that 'There is no document of civilisation that is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[123] Warner is clearly playing with traditional associations of the Highlands with barbarism – another epigraph is from a traditional satirical portrait of God's creation of a 'Helandman' from a 'horss turd'.[124] 'Barbarism' is of course the proper opposite of 'civilisation', connoting uncivilised ignorance and rudeness, and perhaps cruelty or violence. Significantly, the 'barbaric' is also the foreign, the strange, or the wild – anyone or anything 'other', in fact. Benjamin's assertion conflates these binary opposites, bringing barbarity into the orbit of civilisation, recognising the 'other' as an intrinsic part of one's familiar home ground, even of the self. Georg Simmel's theory of 'the stranger' is perhaps the embodiment of this concept, a figure which encapsulates both proximity and distance, familiarity and otherness, revealing the essential 'unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation'.[125] Encountering a

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[123] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks* and Walter Benjamin. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*. Ed. H. Arendt. Trans. H. Zorn. London: Pimlico, 1999. p.248

[124] How the First Helandman of God was Maid', wrongly attributed to Alexander Montgomerie by Alan Warner, epigraph, *The Man Who Walks*.

[125] George Simmel quoted in John Allen, 'On Georg Simmel: Proximity, distance and movement.' *Thinking Space*. Ed. M. Crang & N. Thrift. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p.58

stranger 'throws the doubtful and flickering quality of absence and non-existence back into the faces of those insiders in the local community, throwing into question the sanctity of presence'.[126] The Nephew and his Uncle, The Man Who Walks, are two such strangers, figures who provide an opportunity to assess the interpolation of self and other, the human and the natural world.

Such an interpolation is suggested by the violent, Romanticised past of the Highlands. The historical landscape is ever-present to the imagination of the Nephew, Macushlah, for whom traditional tales of local battles, ambushes and escapes are touchstones for his own pursuit of the Man Who Walks across the landscape. This is a heritage to which both the Nephew and the Man Who Walks are heirs, but they are excluded from it by virtue of their liminal gypsy identity, their lack of a settled home. Discarding the familiar Romantic stereotypes surrounding the Highland 'scenery', landscape in *The Man Who Walks* is introduced to us through the eye of the mysterious uncle, revealing an eerie yet thoroughly modern landscape, 'othered' by the strange presence of the 'ghost bags'. These bizarre phenomena, it emerges, are polythene bags loosed from supermarket car-parks or land-fill sites, tumbling across the hills during the night to appear 'snared on the top barbed-wire of the roadside fences - vibrating, thrumming wild in prevailing westerlies, non-degradable ends ragged, the wind alone and the continual resnaggings of the wayward tattered ends have

[126] *Ibid.* p.58

masticated the plastic rags down to a texture of sickly grey, dead flesh.'[127]

The juxtaposition of the historically-inscribed Highland landscape and markers of 'super-modernity' such as the hydro-electric dam produce an eerie, surreal quality. Lying in his bed at night, the Nephew can hear outside the caravan walls:

> mysterious clicks, the quick bangs of electrics all night long, contacts opening and closing as the electric juice poured down from the hydro's hollow mountain and morning kettles went on in the Settled Community between real walls of bricks and mortar.[128]

There is an irony in this, that the power of the natural world which the Nephew, with his gypsy heritage, knows so well is harnessed to provide domestic comforts for the townsfolk who have rejected him. Clearly, this is a landscape which bears explicit marks of human impact – the environmental and cultural pollution of a homogenising consumer culture, in the form of carrier bags with 'fading blue logos from the multinationals', or the Nephew's borrowed mobile telephone and its 'Rule Britannia' ringtone.[129]

In *Rewriting Scotland*, Cristie March has recently argued that 'In presenting Morvern's Highlands and Islands, Warner illustrates the

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[127] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks*. p.1
[128] *Ibid*. pp.25-26.
[129] *Ibid*. pp.2-3

reach of urban culture and its impact on areas of Scotland long considered reliquaries of traditional Scottish culture. The amalgam...represents a hybrid of Scottish culture.'[130] Certainly, Warner recognises the hierarchy often imposed by cultural 'centres' over supposed 'peripheries' such as the Western Isles, perpetuating the perceived dominance of city over countryside, or mainland over island:

> Due to the shrill demands of modern history, the Hebridean world has constantly to justify itself to the dominant culture on the mainland - for no other reason than that the island culture is distinctive and that it exists.[131]

Warner, born and brought up in Oban, although no longer resident in the Highlands, admits to feeling 'protective' of the cultural heritage of the Western Isles; valuing the 'hard, rough activities' of lives lived close to the natural world, 'aris[ing] from a necessary culture and not modern capitalism and its grand plans.'[132] The Hebrides are an example of 'an entire society slipping into invisibility', effaced by the evolution of 'a single, monolithic culture'.[133] In this sense, the Highlands and Islands do indeed constitute the 'reliquary' of tradition which March suggests; as Warner says, 'Some places, by accident of geography, hang on to aspects of the past - some bad aspects, but

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[130] C. March. *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway, and Kennedy.* Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2002. p.73
[131] Alan Warner. 'Introduction.' *Hebridean Light: Photographs by Gus Wylie with an Introduction by Alan Warner.* Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003. p.6
[132] *Ibid.* p.6
[133] *Ibid.* pp.6-7

some good.'[134] March's analysis does, however, miss a crucial point about Warner's writing. What we see in these novels is not simply a transposition of urban subcultures onto a rural backdrop, creating a hybrid in which the urban element is dominant over the 'peripheral' identity of the Highlands, but a more authentic interaction, a correspondence, between the two. The 'traditional distinctions between urban and rural' have, as March says, been blurred,[135] however, Warner's acknowledgement of issues such as consumerism, drugs, sex, or violence, which have in the past largely been limited to narratives of urban places, does not necessarily disrupt or deny the significance of either the landscape or its 'traditional Scottish culture'.

In fact, the rural environment of the Scottish Highlands and Islands has just as active a role in defining the oddities and tensions of the 'hybrid' region revealed in Warner's novels as does 'urban culture'. If anything, the excesses of 'urban' culture are well-suited to the traditional identity of the region as a 'barbaric' hinterland – 'demented lands' which might rival the violence and confusion of any urban space. In this respect, Warner's stance might be viewed as a hallucinatory, post-modern version of Iain Crichton Smith's attitude expressed in his essay 'Real People in a Real Place', fighting the stereotypes about the region's cultural identity as a Romantic, escapist

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[134] *Ibid.* p.7
[135] C. March. *Rewriting Scotland.* p.75

idyll by evoking a surrealistic representation of its environment and people.

In *The Man Who Walks*, the Nephew recognises the existence of such cultural signifiers embedded in the Highland landscape, the possibility of 'reading' the landscape as a text constructed by humans:

> The land is here, all round us, but each of us pulls from it or inserts into it what we want, we all see it different, like we could meet the ghosts of other folks' needs and dreams wandering the places at night. [136]

Similar issues are being dealt with in Kathleen Jamie's work. In her recent poem, 'Reliquary', she considers the changing face of the Scottish landscape; the values and history we inscribe upon it, set against its own 'natural' history:

> The land we inhabit opens and reveals
> event before event: the stain
> of ancient settlements,
> plague pits where we'd lay
> our fibre-optic cables;
>
> but it yields also moment
> into moment: witness
> these brittle August bluebells
> casting seed, like tiny hearts
> in caskets, tossed onto battle-ground. [137]

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[136] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks*. p.67

[137] Quoted in Lilias Fraser, 'Kathleen Jamie Interviewed by Lilias Fraser'. *Scottish Studies Review*. Spring 2001 Vol. 2 No. 1. 18

'Reliquary' is a keyword which suggests once again Jamie's belief in the importance of determining the 'sacred', of what is worth preserving or remembering. Such terminology might also suggest entombment or stasis, and the poem's juxtaposition of history with modernity, of 'fibre-optic cables' and 'ancient settlements', might seem to ally Jamie with a conservationist agenda. But this poem seems to suggest this mingling of ancient and modern human artefacts is right and proper, evoking the continuity of history combined with the importance of this inevitable moving-on from the days of 'plague pits'.

Clearly, this is a theme which runs through much of her work, from her consideration of the impact of Western tourists and travellers such as herself in the Himalayas[138] to her archaeology of the land-fill site in 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead' or, more recently, whether 'Some history's better forgot' in 'Forget It'.[139] Concurrent to human history, and also incorporating it, is natural history, the tiny 'caskets' of bluebell seeds symbolising the essence of growth and change which is at the heart of all forms of history. This potential for renewal and rebirth is in itself a sacred artefact – a concept which is picked up in John Burnside's poem, 'Fields', which bears an epigraph from Edvard Munch: 'From my rotting body, flowers shall grow and I am in them and that is eternity'. Here, Burnside meditates on the 'Fife and Angus' agricultural tradition of 'Gude Man's Land', an ancient form of

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[138] See Kathleen Jamie. *Among Muslims*. p.149
[139] Kathleen Jamie. 'Forget It'. *Jizzen*. p.5

'Landfill' where 'farmers held | one acre of their land | untilled | unscarred' in an intuitive designation of some places as 'sacred', a place of the dead – or of the devil – which must be left to nature. This gesture of reverence is not, Burnside suggests, the product of any orthodox religious sensibility, but a decision based on the bodily senses, the farmer choosing 'one empty plot | that smelled or tasted right | one house of dreams'.[140]

In *Among Muslims,* Jamie tells of her visit to Askole, an ancient Himalayan village which is now a stop-off point for mountaineers and trekkers on their way to K2:

> 'Nothing's changed.'
> 'Everything. That's the point. It's not there now. The whole village has shifted. See the hills? I went to the exact place he must have taken this picture. I could line up the mountains in the background, yeah? These buildings are gone. It's all gone.'
> I couldn't explain why that was so strange, and interesting.[141]

The Nephew speaks of a similar phenomenon in *The Man Who Walks,* of battlesites and historical locations which have become lost; 'only the burial pits grown over to show for real, like at Culloden.'[142] Scars on the landscape fill the place of human memory, transforming human history into natural history. John Burnside's poem, 'Steinar undir Steinahlithum', was produced after a series of meetings with an

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[140] John Burnside. 'Fields'. *The Asylum Dance.* p.36
[141] Kathleen Jamie. *Among Muslims.* pp.140-141
[142] Alan Warner. *The Man Who Walks.* p.67

ecologist specialising in the botany of the arctic tundra[143] – a topic with which Burnside was already familiar, as a frequent visitor to the northern regions of Scandinavia. This poem, based on the history of an abandoned village sinking into bog-land, speaks of the transitory and difficult nature of establishing a home or settlement in an inhospitable environment. The land, Burnside muses, 'longs for stories to contain: | households and fiefdoms laid down in the dirt', creating an archaeology or even a text which tells of 'a failure in the science of belonging' – ecology itself.[144] In some ways, this echoes the poem, 'Birth Songs', in which he notes 'how lovingly the earth resumes | possession'[145] of human artefacts, both erasing the evidence of human presence and preserving it for posterity – a dual action which both alienates and enfolds.

This ambivalence is reflected in Kathleen Jamie's search for the essence of darkness in her forthcoming prose work, *Findings*. 'Into the Dark' tells of her visit to Maes Howe and Skara Brae, the famous neolithic sites in Orkney. Recognising the 'domestic normality' of these ancient people allows the modern human to 'feel both their presence, their day-to-day lives, and their utter absence. It recalibrates

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[143] Part of the recent 'Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science Project', organised by Robert Crawford.
[144] John Burnside. 'Steinar undir Steinahlithum'. *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science Exhibition*, Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, Dundee, April 2003.
[145] John Burnside. 'Birth Songs'. *The Light Trap*. p.50

your sense of time.'[146] Such viewpoints contrast the permanence of the natural world with the transitory, shifting histories of humans, and the values or identities they associate with landscape – in a sense, how 'space' is transformed into 'place', or even 'home'. They also demonstrate the extent to which environmental history and human history are intertwined. Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* suggests a 'new way of looking', a perception twinned with psychological depth which is akin to a form of archaeology: 'an excavation below our conventional sight-level to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie below the surface'.[147] This might be described as a poetics of archaeology, similar to the philosophical idea of 'unconcealment', the revelation of the truth through a poetic 'making' which Heidegger wrote about.

A yearning for something similar is revealed in Burnside's meditation on *'pentimenti'*, the underpaintings which can sometimes be glimpsed just under the surface of artworks. In *Living Nowhere*, Francis turns to painting as a way of 'plugging in' to the real world, becoming obsessed with the idea of the *pentimento*, 'the visible evidence of an artist changing his mind'. The concept appeared in his work a few years ago, in the poetry collection, *A Normal Skin*, as a meditation on reconstructing the hidden history of his father. In *Living Nowhere*, it becomes a meditation on the value of the work of art itself:

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[146] Kathleen Jamie. 'Into The Dark: A Winter Solstice'. *London Review of Books*. Vol. 25 No. 24, 18 December 2003.'. *The London Review of Books*.
[147] Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory*. p.14

> But what if the *pentimento* was the very point of the painting? What if you did just enough almost to conceal the thing you wanted the viewer to see, almost to hide the image that, because it wasn't too obvious, would be all the more haunting?[148]

Such metaphors of concealment and unconcealment, and their implications for the work of art, are explored by Kathleen Jamie in *Findings*. Jamie's visit to Maes Howe in 'Into the Dark' is portrayed as an equivocal experience, a mingled discovery of inauthenticity and unexpected 'truths'. Expecting to encounter a dark, 'wombish red' chamber in the tomb, Jamie is instead confronted with an interior 'bright as a Tube train', lit by surveyors' lamps which reveal 'every crack, every joint and fissure in the ancient stonework'.[149] However, her encounter with the surveyors and their technical equipment in this ancient space reminds her of the original tomb-builders' craft – an instance of what Heidegger calls *techne* – in which natural phenomena were manipulated in order to create an aesthetic, or dramatic, moment of symbolism. The Maes Howe is, she says, 'a place of artifice, of skill', more like a 'cranium' than a 'womb'.[150] As such, the presence of the surveyors and their light – the metaphor of enlightenment is not lost on Jamie – is entirely appropriate, a modern mirroring of the skilled workmen who built the tomb. But the implications of all this

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[148] John Burnside. *Living Nowhere*. p.315
[149] Kathleen Jamie. 'Into the Dark.' *London Review of Books*. Vol. 25 No.24 18 December 2003.
[150] *Ibid.*

modernity, this scientific technology (as opposed to *techne*) are manifold and possibly disastrous:

> We are doing damage. The surveyors poring over the tomb are working in an anxious age. We look about the world, by the light we have made, and realise it's all vulnerable, and all worth saving, and no one can do it but us.[151]

The dark, which as Jamie notes, has for a long time been appropriated by humans as a cultural metaphor, 'a cover for all that's wicked' rather than 'a natural phenomenon'[152] is representative of the concealed, the hidden 'truth', the mystery of the natural world and of our own natural history. In this piece it seems that Jamie is striving to rehabilitate the dark as a sacred concept, a new metaphor which is suggestive of life rather than death.[153] All of this points to the development of a poetics which, while valuing the 'light', celebrates and protects the 'dark' - a crucial 'line of defence' which may help to mitigate the environmental and cultural 'damage' Jamie suggests we are capable of causing.

Light and dark are similarly important as phenomenological touchstones in John Burnside's work, in which the transformational aspect of darkness - the encounter with 'its textures and wild intimacy' which Jamie seeks in *Findings* - is central to Burnside's development of an ecological poetics in earlier collections such as *Feast Days*, where

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[151] *Ibid.*
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid.*

darkness suggests the life of animals hidden, out of sight, although the use of light, in Burnside's work, is more conventional than in Jamie's.[154] The interplay of light and dark have been explored most recently in 'The Light Trap', the title poem of his latest poetry collection. This meditation on catching and identifying moths at night, broadens out into Burnside's habitual philosophical questions of memory, taxonomy and transformation.[155] Here, darkness also connotes mystery and a certain sense of the sacred. The possibility of enlightenment, of knowing both the names of creatures or objects and their essences, seems unpredictable, the 'new moths catch and spark | on nothingness, arriving from the dark | at shapes and names, through light's pure dazzlement'.[156] For Burnside, the attainment of 'enlightenment' is bound up with his interest in the effacement of the 'ego' combined with his appreciation of *techne* rather than technology.

What this means is a poetics of the active body as a way for humans to reconnect with the earth. 'What we need most,' he says in *The Light Trap*, 'we learn from the menial tasks',[157] citing 'the changeling in a folk tale, chopping logs, | poised at the dizzy edge of transformation' or the Buddhist novice, raking leaves:

finding the body's kinship with the earth

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[154] See John Burnside. 'Urphanomen', *Feast Days*. London: Secker & Warburb, 1992. p.29
[155] John Burnside. 'The Light Trap'. *The Light Trap*. pp.23-25
[156] *Ibid*. p.25
[157] John Burnside. 'Of gravity and light' *The Light Trap*. p.39

beneath their feet, the lattice of a world
where nothing turns or stands outside the whole;

and when the insight comes, they carry on
with what's at hand...[158]

This bodily eco-poetics spills over into Burnside's fiction, as ultimately, the characters in *Living Nowhere* discover a sense of ecological 'belonging' through 'this reconnection with the earth, not in any glamorous or trendy way, but the act of digging... hard work... getting your hands wet and cold, that's part of the deal.'[159] The novel closes with Francis digging in his father's garden back in Corby, the only certainty in life being the physical engagement with the earth in the present moment; work, forgetting himself; 'a man working in a garden, then a garden and nothing else'.[160]

This, in many ways, is the essence of the ecological vision of all three of these younger Scottish writers: an acknowledgement that our relationship with the natural world needs to be physical, as well as contemplative, and above all, that the practice of poetry and prose-writing requires close attention, intuitive observation and a sense of reverence for the 'other': the sacred dark of an Orkney night, the blackbird singing in the garden, or the tug of the wind on a kite.

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[158] *Ibid.* p.39
[159] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004. n.pag.
[160] John Burnside. *Living Nowhere*. pp.372-373

Conclusion:
Attention and Reconnection

> What each generation contributes to the next, in this process, is an *education of attention*... Through this fine-tuning of perceptual skills, meanings immanent in the environment – that is in the relational contexts of the perceiver's involvement in the world – are not so much constructed as discovered.[1]
>
> ...the quality of attention we can bring to a task... it's about repairing and maintaining the web of our noticing, a way of being in the world.[2]

Over the course of this thesis, I have suggested that ecological ways of thinking, which focus on the philosophical discourses of 'being in the world', have been valuable concepts for Scottish writers since the mid-nineteenth century, and that the exploration of what Kathleen Jamie calls 'the web of our noticing' is perhaps the most significant aspect of this modern ecological outlook. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, contemporary Scottish writers like Kathleen Jamie and John Burnside are writing with the development of 'ecological' modes of attention as a conscious objective, and, as I have argued in earlier chapters, previous generations of Scottish writers have been developing modes of attention and representation which coincide with the development of ecological philosophy and environmental science. For example, the

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[1] Tim Ingold. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill.* London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p.22 (original emphasis)
[2] Kathleen Jamie. 'Diary'. *London Review of Books*. Vol.24 No.11. 6th June 2002. p.39

work of nineteenth-century writers considered in Chapters 1 and 2 reflects a crucial shift from the more detached modes of Romantic spectatorship employed in texts such as Walter Scott's *Waverley* to theories of environmentalism emphasising a more bodily experience of the natural world, evident in the adventure fiction and travel books of Robert Louis Stevenson, and in the writings of Scottish mountaineers. Equally significant was the development of local and global perspectives in early twentieth-century literature, which was, I suggested in Chapter 3, a reflection of the 'cosmic and regional' perspectives of the new environmental sciences during this period. Scottish literature since the war has tended to have been viewed in the context of 'urban realism', which has to some extent ignored the work of modern Scottish rural writers in favour of urban writing with a clear international appeal. In Chapter 4, I have argued for a revisioning of this perspective, suggesting that in this age of ecological awareness, Scottish rural writers, particularly of the twentieth century, should be seen as central rather than peripheral to evaluations of Scottish culture, and that ecological thought is also significant in the work of 'urban' writers.

While a variety of 'postmodern' discourses have dominated literary criticism since the 1980s, some recent developments in literary theory have pointed to fresh possibilities in the analysis of texts. The

importance of 'place' or 'territory' rather than 'nationalism' in the formation of literary identities has been explored in a number of recent works of criticism, highlighting the significance of local environmental contexts in the work of 'canonical' writers such as T.S. Eliot and in global artistic movements such as 'modernism', which have traditionally been aligned with metropolitan cultural 'centres'.[3] Over the past decades, a variety of Scottish writers have been pursuing non-urban themes concurrent with the development of non-metropolitan identities which defy the supposed 'centrality' of cities like London and the cultural ascendancy they represent. Burnside's choice to move back to Fife in the 1990s seems significant, given his acknowledgement that the dominance of such 'centres' is as much a bone of contention for contemporary writers as it ever was. In a recent interview, he spoke of the 'perception, especially in the London "centre"',

> that contemporary poets who are really worth something are talking about urban life, about 'postmodern-this' or 'relationships-that'. But I think that's changing now. I think more people are realising that the relationship we have with the natural world... is the main thing we should be exploring right now.[4]

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[3] See, for example, Robert Crawford's work on the importance of 'place' in *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1993) and the chapter on 'Modernism as Provincialism' in *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh, 2000)

[4] John Burnside, interviewed by the present writer, 31 March 2004.

Burnside's own work, as discussed in Chapter 5, reflects his commitment to this ecological goal, with his most recent poetry collections, *The Light Trap* (2002) and *The Asylum Dance* (2000), focusing almost exclusively on ways of relating to the world of nature. The publication of *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring'* (2004), edited by John Burnside and Maurice Riordan, demonstrates that the link between ecological science and literature is being more widely recognised. This anthology marks the fortieth anniversary of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1964), a lucid and extremely popular critique of the environmental impact of American pesticide producers which, for many cultural historians, marks the beginning of the modern 'environmental movement'. Jonathan Bate, like some American ecocritics, has remarked upon the cultural discrepancy between 'environmentalism' and other radical political discourses which became popular in the 1960s, such as feminism, Marxism and the civil rights movement.[5] While feminist, Marxist and post-colonial literary theories quickly evolved to complement these political discourses, no widespread environmental or ecological modes of criticism appeared in the wake of the 'green' movement. This state of affairs has altered over the past decade or so, with the emergence of new forms of critical theory which take 'the study of the

[5] See Jonathan Bate. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2000. pp.71-72.

relationship between literature and the physical environment'[6] as their focus, and are grouped under the heading of 'ecocriticism'.

'Ecocritical' modes of analysis have proliferated in the United States over the past few years. In America, the foundation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992, and its journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in 1993, followed by anthologies of ecocriticism such as *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996, are significant landmarks in the popularisation of such discourses. The North American institutionalisation of ecocriticism is reflected by the proliferation in the early 1990s of university courses on 'literature and environment' and scholars specialising in this field of study. While ecocritical perspectives have gained a secure academic foothold over the past decade, the term 'ecocriticism' was originally coined by the American scholar William Howarth in 1978. On attending the first ASLE conference in 1995, the writer Jay Parini wrote an article for the *New York Times* which identified six 'top courses' and eight scholarly 'gurus' working in the field of

[6] Cheryll Glotfelty. 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis'. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1996. p.xviii

ecocriticism in the United States.[7] The regular publication of anthologies of American ecocriticism suggests that the number of such courses and 'gurus' have increased exponentially since then. In Scotland, John Burnside's teaching of an undergraduate module on 'Literature and Environment' at the University of St Andrews is paralleled by similar courses at the Universities of Stirling, Chichester, Exeter, Leeds and Manchester Metropolitan.[8] John Burnside is certainly the first major poet to teach the subject at a UK university. However, although British universities and writers are catching up with the ecocritical culture of North American educational institutions, relatively little ecocriticism has been produced in Britain as yet. Perhaps predictably, the focus tends to be on English Romanticism, while almost nothing has been written about Scottish

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[7] J. Parini, 'The Greening of the Humanities,' *New York Times Magazine* 29 October 1995: 52-53. 'Top Courses: "Literature of the Wilderness" (David Robertson, University of California at Davis). "The Ecohistory of New England" (Noel Perrin, Dartmouth College). "Representing the Other: Animals in Literature" (Cheryll Glotfelty, University of Nevada at Reno). "Environment and Society" (David Orr, Oberlin College). "Environmental Visions and Environmentalism" (Donald Swearer, Swarthmore College). "Radical Environmentalism" (Stephanie Kaza, University of Verrnont). Gurus: Lawrence Buell, Harvard University. William Cronon, University of Wisconsin at Madison. John Elder, Middlebury College. Cheryll Glotfelty, University of Nevada at Reno. David Orr, Oberlin College. David Robertson, University of California at Davis. Donald Swearer, Swarthmore College. Louise Westling, University of Oregon at Eugene.'

[8] Courses listed as 'Directory of 'ecocritical' courses and modules in the UK compiled by John Parham' in *Green Letters*, the journal of ASLE-UK.

[9] Collections and individually-authored works of American 'ecocriticism' abound. Recent examples include The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993–2003, edited by Michael Branch and Scott Slovic. University of Georgia Press, 2003.J. Rasula, *This compost: ecological imperatives in American poetry* (2003); S. Rosendale (Ed.), *The greening of literary scholarship: literature, theory, and the environment* (2002). Collections of British ecocriticism published thus far include: R. Kerridge & N. Sammells (Eds.), *Writing the environment: ecocriticism and literature* (London, 1998); J. Parham (Ed.), *The environmental tradition in English literature* (London, 2002).

[10] J. Hopkins. 'In the Green Team'. *The Guardian*, Saturday 12 May 2001

literature.[9] Jonathan Bate's studies of ecology and literature, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1995), and most significantly, *The Song of the Earth* (2000), might be described as the foundational texts of British ecocriticism. While the links between ecological thought and American or English literatures continue to be explored by ecocritics, as I have noted in previous chapters, the activities in the exploration and promotion of ecological thought by Scottish writers such as John Burnside have as yet received little critical attention, beyond various labellings of Burnside as a 'nature poet' – a label which Burnside feels is derogatory and trivialising. John Hopkins is one of the first journalists to place Burnside in the context of ecocriticism, writing approvingly of both Bate and Burnside in a review for *The Guardian*, in which he suggests that the 'cultural studies school, with its insistent and self-referential intellectualising, has demoted nature to the status of a linguistic construct... severed from the natural reality to which it refers'.[10] Bate was unaware of Burnside's work at the time of writing *The Song of the Earth*, but has since said that 'if he'd known this existed he'd have incorporated it [*The Asylum Dance*] in *The Song of the Earth*'.[11] However, as it stands, Bate's exploration of ecopoetics does not include any significant analysis of Scottish writers or culture, with the exception of Byron. In fact, only

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[11] Interview with John Burnside, 31 March 2004. (unpublished)

three Scottish writers are mentioned over the course of Bate's three hundred or so pages.[12]

This silence is puzzling, given the historical importance of the rural environment in Scottish literature and culture, and the Scottish engagement with ecological philosophy and science which I have highlighted over the course of this thesis. Such a silence may be due in part to Bate's concentration in *The Song of the Earth* on writers of the 'English canon' which includes the likes of Shakespeare, Keats and Wordsworth. However, Bate's inclusion of less well known writers such as W.H. Hudson, together with international literary figures such as Gary Snyder and Les Murray, suggests that Bate is attempting to achieve as broad a focus as possible. Scottish literature, it seems, just does not register on his ecocritical radar. By contrast, this thesis has argued that not only is ecology important to the understanding of some important aspects of Scottish literature, Scottish thinkers and writers have in fact been pivotal in the development of ecological outlooks. Nineteenth-century intellectuals, mountaineers and land rights campaigners such as John Veitch and John Stuart Blackie helped to mould and enrich a discourse of early environmentalism that focused on the physical interaction between the active body and the natural world, as well as ideals of liberty and conservation which

[12] The three Scottish writers mentioned *The Song of the Earth* are: R.M. Ballatyne, Byron and Walter Scott.

informed North American wilderness protection legislation - ideals which contributed to the foundation of the national parks system by the stravaiging Scots-born environmentalist, John Muir. In a similar vein, the contribution made to the environmental sciences by the Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes in the first decades of the twentieth century is a significant one, and properly ecological in its emphasis on synthesis and models of interconnectivity. Geddes's methods of 'regional survey' combined with his promotion of 'universal geography' not only fed into the Modernist literary experimentations of Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, but also into the work of later ecologists such as Frank Fraser Darling, whose important analysis in the 1940s of human ecology and land use, *West Highland Survey*, adheres to the some of the same principles outlined by Geddes in his articles for the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* earlier in the century.

In their introduction to the recently published *Wild Reckoning*, John Burnside and Maurice Riordan highlight what they see as an ideological division between poetic and scientific ways of looking at nature since the Romantic period. Where 'poets saw beauty, form, even the divine in nature,' they argue, 'scientists observed data, function, the laws of physics'. They go on to suggest that:

> More recently, however, the viewpoints have been moving towards a common appreciation of nature, where function and form, beauty and objective fact, the laws of nature and a sense of mystery can coexist.[13]

In this thesis, I have argued that such a synthesis of viewpoints has in fact been present in Scottish literature all along; that many Scottish writers were canny enough to recognise that the distinction between the two viewpoints was a false dichotomy which could be negotiated in works of literature, while some other modern writers struggled with the idea that 'the progress of man seems to be in a direction away from nature'.[14] Individual Scottish writers have been interested in both the scientific study of the natural world as well as the more Romantic 'appreciation' of beauty and mystery which plants, animals and landscapes can offer to the attentive observer. Such values of 'synthesis' in the arts and sciences were held by a diversity of Scottish writers, including the ramblers and *stravaigers* of the late nineteenth century, the polymathic writer and geographer Patrick Geddes, and the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, whose ideals of linguistic precision and scientific knowledge were fused with a sense of the importance of reverence and attention, demonstrated in poetry such as 'On A Raised Beach'. In the 1940s, the little-known Scottish writer Nan Shepherd wrote in her book about the Grampians, *The Living Mountain*, that

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[13] J. Burnside & M. Riordan, 'Introduction'. *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*. Ed. J. Burnside and M. Riordan. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation: London, 2004.
[14] W.H. Auden.

'Knowledge does not dispel mystery', and that 'the more one learns of this intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissues of plant and insect... the more the mystery deepens'.[15] A similar stance can be found in the work of Shepherd's American contemporary, Rachel Carson, whose expertise in biological and environmental sciences was complementary to her poetic reverence for the 'vast web of life...that wonderful and intricate system of checks and balances'.[16] Such arguments for the compatibility of attentiveness in both the sciences and the arts was echoed recently by Kathleen Jamie, when she stated her belief in the importance of maintaining an authentic 'quality of attention', whether this be the attention of the writer to 'the words on a page' or the attention of the scientist to 'a smear of blood on a slide'.[17]

Ideals of authenticity, such as those proposed by Martin Heidegger or Jean Paul Sartre, are central to the ecological modes of thought and observation in the work of contemporary writers like Jamie and Burnside, as I have shown in Chapter 5. However, the awareness of the importance of such authenticity or ways of 'being-in-the-world' has existed in Scottish literature since the nineteenth century at least. Thoreau's environmental philosophy, Robert Louis Stevenson

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[15] Nan Shepherd. 'The Living Mountain'. in *The Grampian Quartet*. Ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996. p.45
[16] Rachel Carson. *Silent Spring*. London: Penguin, . p.253
[17] Kathleen Jamie. 'Diary'. *London Review of Books*. Vol.24 No.11. 6th June 2002. p.39

suggests, argues that 'if only we could write near enough to the facts...a new and instructive relation might appear between men's thoughts and the phenomena of nature.'[18] The ideals of 'living deliberately' which Stevenson adapts from his reading of Thoreau and Whitman are precursors of the existentialists' ideals of 'authenticity'. For Stevenson, living deliberately is all about 'curiosity', attentiveness, 'doing at least one thing keenly and thoughtfully, and [being] thoroughly alive to all that touches it'.[19] In contrast to this, he sketches the sort of inauthentic lifestyle (what an Existentialist might call 'bad faith') in which the 'dead-alive' individual walks 'in a faint dream... taking so dim an impression of the myriad sides of life that he is truly conscious of nothing but himself.'[20] The aim of writers like Whitman and Thoreau, Stevenson suggests, is to 'shake people out of their indifference'[21], to ask questions and provoke responses in the reader – exactly the sort of engagement which later Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid or John Burnside have been striving for.

MacDiarmid argued in the 1920s that the Scots vocabulary he had discovered by reading Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish*

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[18] Robert Louis Stevenson. "Henry David Thoreau". *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. p.105

[19] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'The Silverado Squatters'. *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Vol 2. Swanston Edition. 25 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus. 1911.p.238

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Walt Whitman'. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. p.66

Language constituted a valuable 'unutilized mass of observation'[22] which was a 'vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking'[23]. The crucial features of this vocabulary, for MacDiarmid, were precisely what had consigned it to obscurity: its roots in the Scottish rural environment, and its ability to describe and facilitate the relationships of rural people to that environment. MacDiarmid's early lyrics, such as 'The Watergaw', demonstrate the dual potential of such poetic vocabulary for both exactitude (the compression of complex meanings into the space of one word or phrase) and mystery (the ambiguity suggested by the use of unfamiliar sounds and terminologies). As I have suggested previously, it is both striking and significant that MacDiarmid marked his Modernist *debut* with a lyric composed of Scottish rural vocabulary and imagery. MacDiarmid's theories of the perceptive and descriptive abilities of 'synthetic Scots' evolved into his later adoption of scientific vocabularies and theories of a poetry of 'facts' or 'knowledge', which involved certain amount of stylistic and thematic risk-taking. MacDiarmid's efforts towards authentic poetic knowledge were predicated on the basis that attentiveness – the 'ordnance survey' mode of sight he argues for in *Scottish Scene* – and fidelity of linguistic representation are essential for 'plugging in' to the world through the writing of poetry. Poems like

[22] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'A Theory of Scots Letters'. *Selected Prose*. Ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992.

'In Talk with Duncan Ban MacIntyre', which talk about the possibility of authentic reconnection with the natural world through the medium of Gaelic poetry or ecological science, or the 'borrowed' lyric, 'Perfect', hailed as 'the poem that...the Imagists talked about but did not write' are just two examples of this search. [24] I have argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that such methods capitalise on what Gaston Bachelard described in *The Poetics of Space* as the 'phenomenological reverberation' of the poetic image MacDiarmid, like other twentieth-century Scottish writers, was trying to negotiate the legacy of Romanticism by fusing it with more concrete, 'materialist' ways of reconnecting with the natural world.[25]

Straightforward Wordsworthian Romanticism, however aesthetically or spiritually attractive, no longer seemed adequate or appropriate to many modern Scottish writers. While Romanticism undoubtedly continued - and continues - to be influential, realisations of its inadequacy have provoked varied responses in the formation of modern Scottish writers' models of attentiveness, observation and representation. In the late Victorian period, this frustration crystallised in George Douglas Brown's *The House With The Green Shutters* (1901). This is essentially a novel of contrasts between a

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[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Cited in Alan Bold. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Biography*. p.423
[25] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. (1958; trans. 1964) Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p.xxvii

transcendent but ultimately alienating 'nature' and the parochial nastiness of a small Scottish town. The novel as a whole is characterised by what Brown called 'my morbid gift of seeing and remembering and visualising physical things'[26]. The protagonist, a young man afflicted with 'too nervous a sense of the external world'[27] lacks the poetic ability to make sense of what he sees, which leaves his consciousness 'dispersed in a thousand perceptions and a thousand fears'[28]. Brown's novel suggests that Romantic modes of observation are no longer a viable option, producing a crisis of representation which leaves the sensitive observer alienated from a natural world which has become meaningless – or at least, left to decipher a 'nature' whose meaning can no longer be understood in traditional ways.

In his important essay, 'Realism in Gaelic Poetry', Sorley Maclean asked 'Why did Wordsworth bury his head in an illusory intuition into the message of hills or hedge-rows?'[29] Looking back to traditions in Gaelic poetry, and writers like Duncan Ban Macintyre, Maclean argued for the importance of descriptive 'realism' suffused with genuine emotion, in contrast to what he saw as escapist Romantic ideologies, whose emotions were fundamentally inauthentic

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[26] Cited in I. Campbell, *Kailyard*. Edinburgh : Ramsay Head Press, 1981 p.66
[27] George Douglas Brown. *The House With The Green Shutters*. p.151
[28] *Ibid*. p.145
[29] Sorley Maclean. 'Realism in Gaelic Poetry'. *Ris a' bhruthaich : criticism and prose writings*. Stornoway: Acair, 1985. p.19

responses, 'mere fancifulness, day-dreaming, wish-fulfilment, or weak sentimentality'.[30] In the same essay, he goes on to argue that

> Macintyre's objective naturalist realism is likely to be considered far more permanently significant than the mixture of sentimentalism, pure illusion and ruminating subjectivity, lit up by great flashes, which constitutes Wordsworth's poetry... *Beinn Dobhrain* makes no pretension to metaphysical content; actually its realisation of dynamic nature makes its essential philosophic value as far superior to Wordsworth's poetry as it is in pure technique.[31]

This is a new perspective on 'nature writing', replacing Romantic 'sympathy' with new ways of relating to the natural world which de-emphasise anthropocentrism or Romantic egoism. Such explorations by writers like MacDiarmid or Maclean in the mid-twentieth century establish the groundwork for later writers like John Burnside to explore constructions of 'self' and 'other' in the context of ecological theory. Modern Scottish views of 'ecology' are not simply the appropriation of Romantic discourses but are attempts to find new ways of thinking about and representing the natural world. Scottish literature since the mid-nineteenth century has been evolving new ways of 'tuning in' to the natural world in which the 'words on a page', the practices of reading and writing are themselves the most significant.

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[30] *Ibid.* pp.16-17
[31] *Ibid.* p.34

By looking at Scottish literature through the lens of ecological thought, I have sought to provide a fresh perspective in contrast to the well-worn and perhaps over-used critical discourses of gender, nationalist politics and urbanism which have tended to dominate Scottish literary studies in recent years. This thesis has demonstrated that Scottish writers over the past one hundred and fifty years have been engaged in a search for ways of reconnecting with the natural world. Viewed within this framework, modern Scottish literature constitutes a crucial 'education of attention' which has been transmitted from generation to generation of Scottish writers – a heritage of ecological thought which, in this age of environmental awareness, should be recognised as not only relevant, but vital.

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